

Sovereign Seeds

Annual Report

2023



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A message

from our *Executive Director*



This year marked a significant chapter of organizational self-determination for Sovereign Seeds. While we have always been rooted in Indigenous by-and-for governance, establishing ourselves as an independent charitable entity in 2023 brought challenges and opportunities to rebuild on our own terms with a stronger integration of wellness and reciprocity. As we continue our work, we maintain our belief in the power of collaboration and solidarity, and we honour our accountability to the powerful change that is found in the kitchen tables and gardens of our collective food sovereignty movement building.

Through these shifts, we remained dedicated to Sovereign Seeds' heart's work, which lies in our community-directed programs. Our Indigenous Seed Keeping and Agriculture Education Program, spanning training, facilitation, mentorship, and seed distribution, supported a total of 532 program participants across five provinces. Alongside our programming, we concentrated greater efforts on leadership amplification in agriculture and climate sectors, mobilizing community priorities towards advocacy action for current and future generations.

It has been deeply inspiring and energizing to nurture the love and passion so many Indigenous food learners and leaders feel for sacred relationships with our food systems. I am sincerely grateful for everyone who has shared in our growth journey and collaborations this year. I am so honoured to share our key moments with you, and I am excited for what the coming year holds. Thank you for growing with us!

Kishchi maarsii,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Davies". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Nicole Davies

Founder and Executive Director



About Sovereign Seeds

Our Vision

We envision a world where Indigenous people are living thriving, ancestrally-guided food realities for the health of our communities, our more-than-human relatives, the climate, and the territories we belong to.



Our Values

Indigenous food sovereignty is connected to decolonial, just, and sustainable futures. Indigenous people have an inherent and inherited right to unobstructed relationships with the land, ecosystems, teachings, and practices that comprise their cultural food systems. We ground our efforts in Indigenous ways of being and doing, and we apply care, consent, self-determination, relationality, accountability, and solidarity-building in our approach. We know the seeds and the food species we depend on are relatives that we have a responsibility to nurture, respect, and protect. We honour the past and current legacies of existing community food leadership, and we understand our responsibility to uplift and amplify these voices and efforts.



Our Mission

We create meaningful opportunities in cultural revitalization, entrepreneurship, and advocacy with and for Indigenous food leaders and learners. Through cultural education, sector training, and leadership amplification, we strengthen Indigenous food sovereignty, food cultures, and food system climate resilience to support communities in restoring, living, and stewarding their food relationships.



Program Activities

in 2023



Sovereign Seeds

Indigenous Seed Keeper & Agriculture Education Program

Historical and ongoing colonization has severely impacted cultural growing practices in our communities. Factors such as seed and knowledge theft, land dispossession, colonial agriculture practices, and child apprehension have all compromised our teachings and culturally significant seeds, foods, and medicines. Despite the ways cultural knowledge has been intergenerationally fragmented and interrupted, Indigenous people are eager to reconnect to their sustenance relationships and are working to (re)learn and revitalize their practices.



ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS SEED KEEPER & AGRICULTURE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Since Sovereign Seeds' inception in 2019, education and training have overwhelmingly and consistently been the most substantial requests we have received from Indigenous communities and initiatives. Through our Indigenous Seed Keeper and Agriculture Education Program, we collaborate with Indigenous partners to develop and deliver tailored education and training opportunities on seed keeping, food growing, and plant medicine practices. Our offerings span in-person and online formats, including webinars and presentations, demonstrations and workshops, online courses, facilitated discussion and group visioning sessions, gatherings, and others. We deliver and facilitate knowledge sharing within a healing justice, anti-oppression, decolonial, cultural, and spiritual teaching framework.

2023 marked our most robust program year to date. We delivered eight tailored seed-keeping and agricultural education events across Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario.





CURRICULUM & FACILITATION TOPICS

Learning topics included seed and knowledge assessment training; garden preparation and planning strategies; season extension strategies and growing in northern climates, seed-to-seed cycle intensive Indigenous seed keeper training; ethical seed sourcing; moon cycle planting teachings; soil and pollinator health; crop and climate change record-keeping; variety breeding for climate change resilience; ancestral seed and food processing, preservation, and cooking technologies; seed and food storage; seed bank creation and food initiative building; plant medicine teachings and application; and agricultural resistance histories and the impact of colonial policies in Indigenous food sovereignty, food market participation, and knowledge transmission.

In 2023, we also delivered facilitated insight sessions in which we continued our program's dialogue facilitation offerings. We facilitated four community group discussions to support partners in four respective areas: knowledge gaps, barriers, and visions in starting a community food garden; observations in inter- and cross- generational food knowledge sharing; priorities in seed, food, and medicine programming in an urban context; and exploring group seed and seed knowledge ethics, protocols and agreements.

Sovereign Seeds continues to experience high interest through this program, and we are working to scale up our capacity and resources to meet requests.



Mentorship, Advising, & Peer Knowledge Sharing

Indigenous leadership is underrepresented in the charitable sector, and many grassroots Indigenous seed, food, and medicine initiatives are inadequately supported in collaborating and knowledge sharing with peers. In response, we have supported and connected with many Indigenous learners and leaders of grassroots organizations, community initiatives, and personal facilitator development journeys in so-called Canada and the US who are at different stages of their food sovereignty paths.



MENTORING & ADVISING PEERS AND EMERGING LEADERS

This year, Sovereign Seeds engaged in mentorship, advising, and informal peer knowledge sharing to and with community members and groups starting or striving to start cultural food teaching activities, start or scale up their food initiatives and organizations, create cultural educational resources, and/or navigate the nonprofit sector. We provided advising on the development of educational resources, curriculum development, program design and delivery, garden and farm site establishment and development, developing sector partnership principles, and advancing Indigenous workplace wellness in the charitable sector.





PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN 2023

Seed & Plant Medicine Distribution

This year, Sovereign Seeds produced over 300 lbs of culturally-significant regionally adapted seeds and over 150 bundles of culturally-significant plant medicines. These were distributed to attendees in our Indigenous Seed Keeper and Agriculture Education Program events.

CULTURAL SEED, FOOD, AND MEDICINE EXCHANGES

In 2023, we facilitated end-of-event seed, food, and medicine exchanges for participants and students, where we distributed these seeds and medicines through these exchanges. We also distributed seeds, foods, and medicines through our attendance at Indigenous peer groups' and communities' events, reaching Sovereign Seeds program participants, their extended circles, and many others across territories. Through these cultural seed, food, and medicine distributions, we aim to uphold Indigenous gift and exchange food economies, and we also document and draw on our farm activities as training examples in our curriculum on topics of growing, harvesting, and seed variety adaptation practices.



Knowledge Mobilization, Leadership Amplification, & Advocacy

Through all our program activities, Sovereign Seeds strives to amplify Indigenous food learners' and leaders' voices in spaces and levers of power impacting agriculture, land access, and climate response where decisions impacting us, our food systems, and our territories are made without us.



As an Indigenous organization of food sovereignty cultural practitioners and activists, we honour calls to mobilize people, voices, and resources in our collective movement building. Our personal paths and our organizational work's scope positions us on the ground, where we voice and witness voices expressing challenges and dreams. Through our growing advocacy and leadership amplification activities, and through opportunities with media, funders, government representatives, researchers, and advising, we amplify these priorities to advocate for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in seed, food, medicine, climate, and beyond.

NATIONAL CLIMATE ADVOCACY

In 2023, Sovereign Seeds analyzed three years of insights heard through our program activities related to Indigenous experiences and perspectives in adapting cultural seed varieties for climate. Through this insight mobilization, we identified key themes on challenges, priorities, and recommendations in cultural seed adaptation and provided multi-sector policy and funding recommendations. We aimed to amplify this advocacy through participation in the Canadian Climate Institute and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources' Indigenous Perspectives Case Study Program, through which we published our analysis in our case study *Indigenous Seed Keeping and Seed Climate Adaptation: Challenges, Priorities, and Multi-Sector Change in Resourcing and Advancing Indigenous Agricultural and Climate Sovereignty*.

INTERNATIONAL RIGHTS ADVOCACY

This year, we also participated in Columbia University's International Summer Program on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Policy, and we began developing responses to domestic and international policies and discussions on seed breeding, seed regulations, and barriers for Indigenous peoples' in maintaining seed governance sovereignty at the juncture of settler-led agroecology activism and international biodiversity and intellectual property mechanisms and conventions.

In the years ahead, we are committed to expanding our leadership mobilization and advocacy efforts to amplify challenges and priorities in Indigenous food sovereignty movements.

Operations Successes

in 2023



OPERATIONS SUCCESSES IN 2023

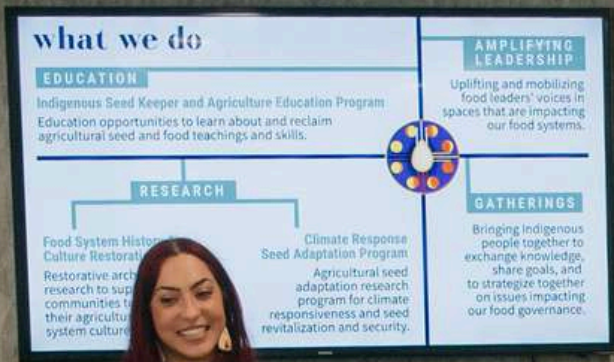
CHARITY STATUS SECUREMENT

2023 was a significant period of transition and growth. This year, Sovereign Seeds evolved from an Indigenous-led program with a fiscal sponsorship agreement to an incorporated non-profit entity, and finally, into an independent Indigenous-led national organization with charitable status. We began and have continued a process of establishing new and revising existing workplace infrastructure and processes, including policies, protocols, and ways of working with one another and with partners.

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

We believe that the most impactful food sovereignty change and cultural revitalization advances are happening at the grassroots level by the efforts of dedicated community learners and leaders. Colonial administration and models of operation continue to be at odds with Indigenous governance. This growth and achievement expands our resource eligibility and opportunity for sustainability for our work and our team, yet it also requires increased operations capacity and requires heightened accountability to our ethics and cultural values. We are committed to challenging the traditional charitable sector to strengthen Indigenous sovereignty and mobilizing resources for on-the-ground leadership.





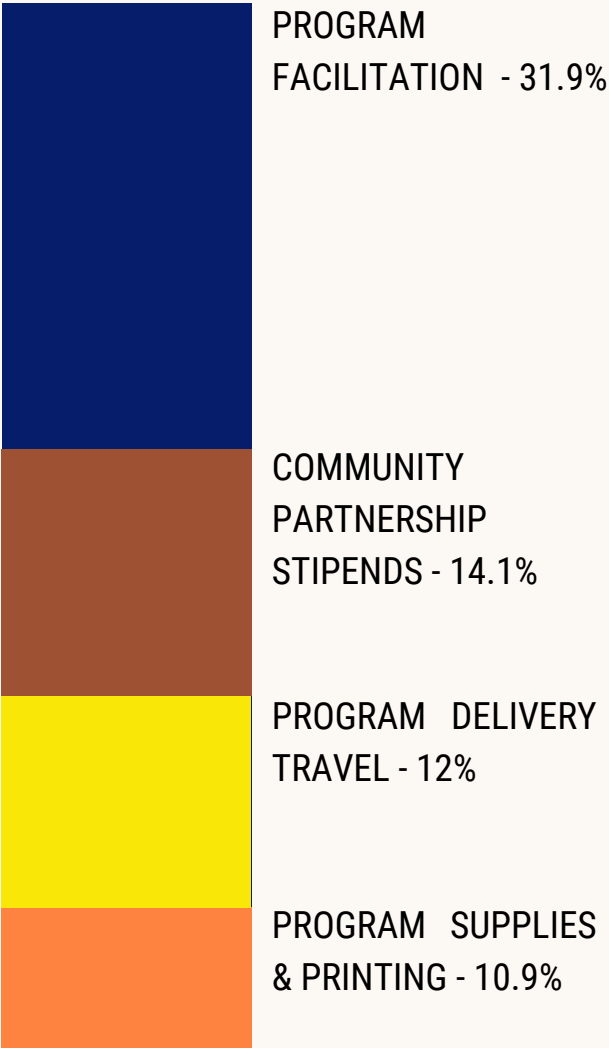
OPERATIONS SUCCESSES IN 2023

Professional Development & Sector Learning

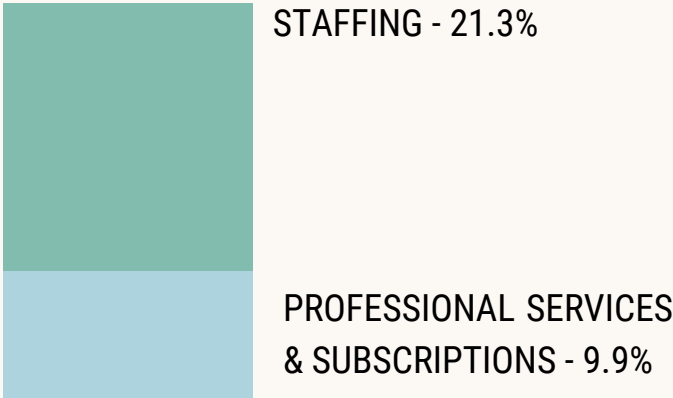
Along with our emergence as a federally registered national charity, we undertook nine months of professional development with nonprofit sector peer leaders and organizations this year. Their guidance and story-sharing supported us in tending to our learning edges on strategic planning, administration, operation systems, and charity governance. Mentorship and learning opportunities for Indigenous organizations and leadership is scarce, and cultivating relationships of mutual learning and support has nurtured our growth. We are grateful for opportunities to exchange experiences with and learn from peers and mentors, and these efforts are ongoing into 2024.

Financial Snapshot: 2023 Expenses

INDIGENOUS SEED KEEPING & AGRICULTURE EDUCATION PROGRAM 68.85% OF OVERALL EXPENSES



OPERATIONS & GOVERNANCE 31.15% OF OVERALL EXPENSES



Thanks & Acknowledgement

Our deepest gratitude to the beautiful community of Indigenous initiatives, seed and food leaders, artists, activists, healers, youth, caregivers, scholars, and Knowledge Holders who have gathered with us around shared visions of cultural revitalization, sovereignty, and food justice. Thank you for sharing your hearts and minds in this work with us.

Our heartfelt appreciation to the Swift Foundation, the New Field Foundation, NDN Collective, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Groundswell Community Justice Trust Fund, the Lawson Foundation, and Aritzia, and to every supporter who donated to or amplified our work. Thank you for believing in what we do.



Our sincerest thanks to many sector leaders and specialists who have supported our organizational growth journey in 2023 including Marissa Hill, Dena Klashinsky, Akram Raouf, Kris Archie and The Circle on Philanthropy, Suzanne Benally, Tina Kuckkahn, Shoreline Collaboratives, Rory McLeod, Jonathon Landeck, and Wendy Katherine.

All contributors, whether through amplifying, knowledge sharing, mentoring, learning, networking, or financial support, have played an impactful role towards thriving Indigenous food sovereignty realities. Your meaningful support is encouraging and energizing as we collectively nurture our peoples' sustenance cultures and climate response for current and future generations.

Looking Ahead

2024





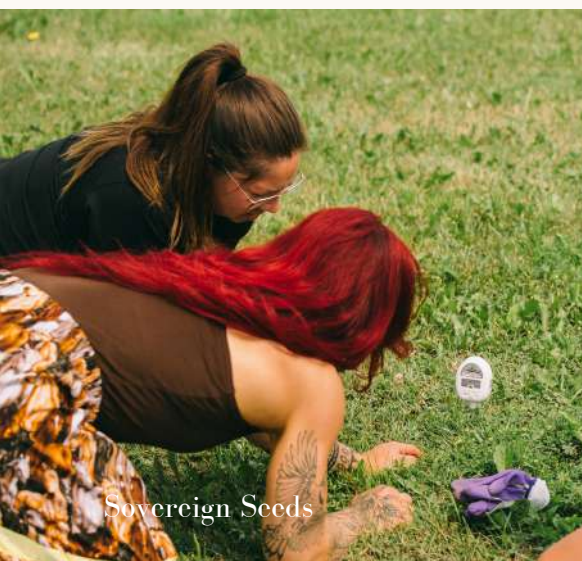
2024 PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Our Indigenous Seed Keeper and Agriculture Education Program has been and will continue to be our guiding program, centering cultural revitalization into 2024 and beyond. We will advance our curriculum and continue our training and facilitation offerings in collaboration with waitlisted and new partners.

In response to community requests, we are excited to develop and launch our Cultural Food and Agriculture Entrepreneurship Program, a program stream dedicated to supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship. Indigenous food business leaders are working to create access to cultural and culturally-stewarded foods while operating with Indigenous economic values and commitments to community, culture, and the land.

Indigenous chefs, caterers, farmers, harvesters, medicine gatherers, value-added food producers, food product aggregators, and others experience complex realities of honouring cultural economies under colonial economic systems without Indigenous-dedicated learning spaces.

Sovereign Seeds' new Indigenous Cultural Food and Agriculture Entrepreneurship Program will work to nurture, support, and connect Indigenous food leaders navigating for-profit markets. Through this new program, we are excited to provide culturally-centered and values-guided learning and mentorship opportunities to assist Indigenous cultural food and agriculture entrepreneurs in developing and scaling their endeavours.

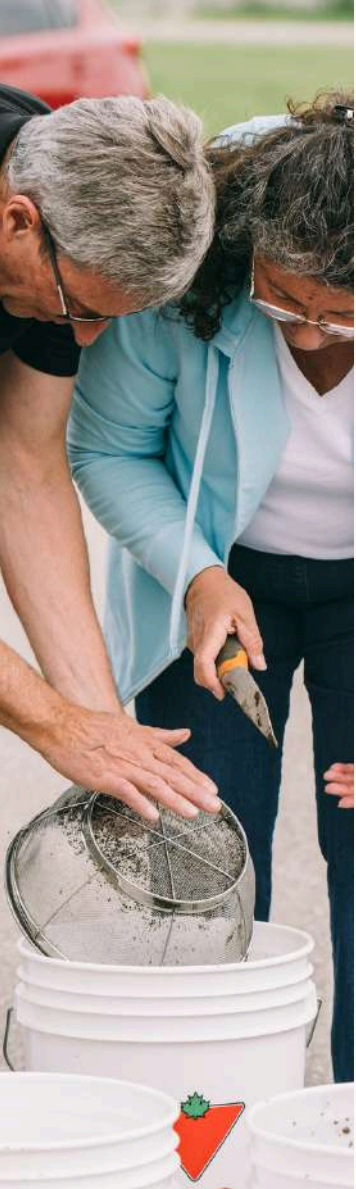




2024 ADVOCACY ACTION & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Building on our 2023 knowledge mobilization activities, we aim to release additional collected insights via reports and publications to advance our advocacy efforts. Over time, we hope to continue to mobilize community perspectives to amplify calls to action in areas of climate response, seed governance and cultural data sovereignty, cultural education, agricultural policy, philanthropy, and others.

Operating in Indigenous ways of being necessitates that we recognize the interdependent link between individual wellness and community wellness. Continued colonization takes a heavy toll on Indigenous food sovereignty learners and leaders, and justice and reciprocity are key drivers in the work we do. For Sovereign Seeds, this means that to continue this community-based work with integrity and care, we have a responsibility to rectify gaps in our team's capacity. To see our network and the relationships that comprise it thrive, we plan to continue our peer learning and internal organizational development journey, and prioritize team health and wellness in the process. This growth will support team sustainability and will better equip us to meet community requests. We hope our learning and experiences will be helpful to others, as others' stories and guidance has been for us.





2024 AND BEYOND: RESOURCING NEW PROJECTS

In 2024 and beyond, we will work to resource community-responsive projects that have long been incubating, including multimedia storytelling projects, archival research and repatriation liaison support services, education resource publications, and climate adaptation programs.



Support Our Efforts

Indigenous food sovereignty impact requires Indigenous community leadership. To us, this means that for our programs to be successful, accountable, responsible, and sustainable, they must be led by Indigenous people who are directly impacted by the issues we are responding to. Critical to this success are supporters who honour, trust, and respect on-the-ground Indigenous leadership, and who believe in the power and processes of our community-initiated change.

FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS

We warmly invite values-aligned funders to join us in this undertaking. We welcome exploratory conversations with those looking to support our efforts, with a particular preference for multi-year commitments. For funding relationship inquiries, please contact us via email at [development\[at\]sovereignseeds.org](mailto:development[at]sovereignseeds.org).

DONATE ONLINE

Please consider supporting us in strengthening Indigenous seed and cultural food sovereignty by visiting www.sovereignseeds.org/donate to donate, which directs to our CanadaHelps page. All donations receive an official charitable tax receipt through CanadaHelps.



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT

- Page 1:** Esta Bee Photography
- Page 2:** Shelby Lisk Photography
- Page 3:** Shelby Lisk Photography
- Page 4:** Sovereign Seeds
- Page 5:** From L to R: Shelby Lisk Photography, Esta Bee Photography
- Page 6:** Sovereign Seeds
- Page 7:** Shelby Lisk Photography
- Page 8:** Sovereign Seeds
- Page 9:** From L to R: Sovereign Seeds, Shelby Lisk Photography
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