



PROTOCOLS FOR ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & COMMUNITIES

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PROTOCOLS FOR ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & COMMUNITIES

WHAT ARE INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS?

The term Indigenous Protocols is becoming commonplace within organizations to improve processes in day-to-day interactions with Indigenous Peoples and communities. The concept of Indigenous Protocols varies from nation to nation; however, it is not a prescribed set of rules or behaviours that must be adhered to. It is a principle-based approach on how interactions occur cross-culturally to ensure respectful engagement with Indigenous Peoples and communities. It has practical applications for many Indigenous nations which have occurred since time immemorial. Following Indigenous Protocols is a sign of respect, awareness and cultural sensitivity. Listed below are a few examples of protocols that may be implemented within your organization. Additional resources can also be found on the Legacy Schools and Legacy Spaces programs' resource pages and in your ReconciliACTION Toolkit.

1. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Land acknowledgments and personal introductions are a way of showing respect and gratitude for Indigenous cultures and the traditional lands we live on. Land acknowledgments are recommended daily to influence organizational culture as a reminder of who we are as peoples in Canada. Meaningful consultation and dialogue as a community with Indigenous and non-Indigenous members will ensure it is implemented appropriately.

Recommendations for moving forward with developing a land acknowledgment include but are not limited to:

- Research:

Who are the host First Nation, Inuit, and/or Métis communities where you reside?

If you reside within a town or city, acknowledge the Urban Indigenous community (ie, First Nation, Inuit, and Métis) as well.

- Collaborate with Indigenous community members to obtain historical knowledge to improve relations at the local and regional levels.
- Invest the time and resources to build meaningful relationships within the community to draft a land acknowledgment. Refrain from using Google to prevent any misunderstanding and to ensure the appropriate consultation has taken place.
- Invite a local or regional Elder to inaugurate the land acknowledgment and provide a teaching on improving its meaning and relevancy on how we share the lands as a community.

- Ensure you have the proper pronunciations of the Indigenous nations being acknowledged within your statement as a sign of respect.
- Welcome feedback from local Indigenous communities about your land acknowledgment.
- Within the land acknowledgment, identify if your community is on treaty lands or unceded territories. For example, the City of Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit.
- Take the time to research and understand treaty and land right terms: ceded and unceded, historic treaties, modern treaties, Indigenous title, Indigenous rights, inherent rights, time immemorial, etc.
- Practice cultural humility and know improved relations cross-culturally is a life-long journey of learning and being authentic in your approach is a good step forward.

Whether you are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, personal introductions are a way to show respect to the traditional lands where you live or where you have come from. A personal introduction can include:

- Your name
- Where you come from; this can include your family's geographical or cultural background
- The treaty or traditional lands you reside on
- Give thanks to delegates in attendance: Elder, Knowledge Keeper, organizer, etc.



2.ENGAGING WITH ELDERS, KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS, & CULTURAL ADVISORS

Inviting an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or cultural advisor is a meaningful way to continue the journey of reconciliation. It provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis knowledge, cultural beliefs and traditional practices in a shared learning environment. It's important to note that relationship building with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural advisors is an important component of engaging Indigenous communities and should be a part of a long-term plan.

WHO IS AN ELDER?

The term Elder varies from nation to nation, so it is important to be mindful of how geographical contexts of urban, remote, and rural settings can determine how Elder is interpreted. An appropriate first step would be to inquire with the local or host First Nation, Inuit, or Métis communities about how they define who is an Elder.

An Elder generally has longstanding recognition within the community and is well-respected through their actions, words, and character. Elders are not a self-prescribed term for individuals wishing to share cultural knowledge or teachings. Elders generally have been recognized to pass on knowledge and engage within the community. It is important to have a procurement process to ensure you establish meaningful engagement for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural advisors.

Recommendations for engagement and contact:

- Invitations for engagements should be done within a timely manner to ensure that they allow Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or cultural advisors time to prepare and become informed of the requests or support required.
 - Note: Avoid last-minute invitations as they are not reflective of meaningful engagement.
- Establishing contact is generally best done face-to-face or if circumstances do not permit face-to-face contact, a virtual meeting or a phone call may be applicable. During initial contact, inquire about any specific requests or protocols that may be recognized when moving towards the future event or engagement.

- Note: Do not assume the appropriate offering to make when providing an Elder with a cultural exchange. It is best to inquire during the preliminary contact with the individual or community, or with the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or cultural advisor directly. Do not force an immediate response. Provide time for them to reflect. See Section 3 on Gift Giving for more information.
- During face-to-face interactions be mindful of your gesturing through handshakes and body language as many Indigenous communities use various methods of communication. For example, many Indigenous people may communicate through informal methods such as using body language to answer questions. Linguistic diversity and awareness of various methods of communication and interaction are important to be respectful of cross-cultural communications.
- A general baseline fee should be determined within your organization for compensating Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural advisors.
- **Honoraria**
 - Communicate the process, timelines, and documentation required before any agreements are established to ensure there is no confusion. Keep in mind, for honorarium payments in excess of \$500, a T4A form is required.
 - Establish a process for hourly, half-day, and full-day rates within the organization.
 - Providing cash, a cheque, or other form of payment on the day of the event is respectful. If using direct deposit, ask if the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or cultural advisor has a helper to assist them so the process is understood. Ensure payment is received in a timely manner.
- **Travel Costs**
 - Always ensure that travel costs are covered to assist with the transportation and if accommodations are required to book in advance.

3. GIFT GIVING

Presenting or exchanging gifts is a sign of respect and mutual understanding during cross-cultural engagements. The form of the gift is determined by the organizer; however, the act of gift giving welcomes one into the organization's environment. It would be important to consult and liaise with local and regional Indigenous community members on identifying an appropriate gift to ensure it is respectful and will not offend the recipient. An example of this, many organizations provide tobacco ties as an exchange of respect; however, it is not a culturally relevant practice for all Indigenous nations. The principal of gift giving can be applied to any Indigenous speaker or guest.

4. NETWORKING, LIAISING, AND PROCUREMENT

While conducting business and building relationships with Indigenous professionals it is important to ensure processes are in place and that services and individuals are appropriately vetted. For any consultation process, it is important to reduce the potential for tokenism or misrepresentation of Indigenous engagement while conducting business. For example, if a request for proposal (RFP) or procurement is made by your organization, establishing appropriate guidelines is important to reduce the potential risk of individuals applying who are not suited for the project. Based on the scope of work being undertaken, it is best to identify your service catchment area and hire individuals who are best suited within that geographical region to support the work being undertaken. Procurement is a broad area that needs a thoughtful approach. The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) is a great resource for companies looking to enhance their procurement with Indigenous communities and businesses.

Recommendations to facilitate the process:

- Reach out to Band offices, Tribal Councils, Friendship Centres.
- Produce guidelines to ensure the applicant's roles and responsibilities are understood.
- Establish a resource pool of identified Indigenous professional(s) to assist as a liaison in providing support for external engagement.
- If an RFP is issued, ensure the application process is clear and highlights who is eligible to apply.

5. PHOTO AND VIDEO PERMISSION

For events, teachings, workshops, training, or any other business with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or cultural advisors, it is important that all parties are clear if the engagement will be photographed or recorded. A release form should be created and include a statement that is culturally sensitive to what is being captured and how the media will be distributed. For example, in some ceremonial practices, it is inappropriate to record or photograph. For any media reproductions of the engagement, ensure that the integrity of the words spoken, knowledge shared will be maintained, and that consent is gained on the final materials.

All professionals engaging with Indigenous community members throughout the planning and execution of the engagement should be trained on Indigenous protocols and codes of conduct. When producing any materials in media, a commonly heard phrase is “Nothing about us, without us.” A helpful resource to guide your processes is the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples principle of Free, Prior, Informed, Consent for approval on all Indigenous-led productions.](#)



6.VETTING RESOURCES

Distribution of resources for educational and informational purposes is a benefit to increase awareness of Indigenous Peoples and communities. There are a few aspects to be mindful of when distributing resources or information that may not have been reviewed, vetted, or approved by Indigenous community members. It is an important step to take in order to reduce the potential for misinformation, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding. Any action or reconciliation undertaken is a benefit for all peoples in Canada; however, ensuring that affiliated resources are appropriately vetted before distribution is a precautionary step to ensure your organization is coming from an informed position.

Recommendations for determining if a resource is suitable for use:

- Indigenous Peoples have been involved in the development and/or vetting of the resource and you have permission to use it.
- The resource references local Indigenous Peoples in your community, where possible.
- Indigenous worldviews and cultural differences between nations are evident.
- Indigenous Peoples are not stereotyped, portrayed in a negative tone, given a subtle bias, or paternalism (a sense of non-Indigenous superiority).
- The use of language and terminology is appropriate.
- The use of images, content, and information is not promoting cultural appropriation. If it is unclear, consult with an Indigenous professional who is experienced within that field or subject matter.

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