

Procedure Name:	Procedures for Respectful Engagement with First Peoples Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders	
Approved By:	President's Council	
Approval Date:	2021	
Amendment Date:	June 2021	
Policy Holders:	Indigenous Advisor to the President's Office	
Policy Number:	INDIG-001P	
Category:	Indigenization	

## PROCEDURES FOR RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRST PEOPLES ELDERS AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

### 1.00 PURPOSE OF INVITATION

Start with deciding on the intended purpose of the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder's role. If this is your first time seeking the assistance of an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder, begin by contacting the Indigenous Relations and Executive Advisor to ensure that the presence of an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder is appropriate.

### 2.00 WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO INVITE AND HOST AN ELDER OR CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDER TO THE COLLEGE/CLASSROOM?

2.01 This depends on the type of First Peoples speaker you want to invite, your relationship with them, and the context of the project or event. For example, the circumstances where you would invite a First Peoples colleague into your classroom as a guest lecturer are different from when and how you would invite an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder.

2.02 It is appropriate to invite speakers into your classroom when touching on topics that specifically focus on First Peoples lives, especially when there is not a lot of information on this topic from First Peoples authors, course readings, or supplementary course materials do not give an accurate picture about the First Peoples perspective of their lives. However, in projects or events where First Peoples traditions, ceremonies, stories,

or life teachings are discussed, it is always necessary to have an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder present the information.

### **3.00 EXTENDING INVITATIONS**

- 3.01 A request **MUST** be sent well in advance (minimum 5 business days) when extending invitations to Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders. Invitations are best made in person; however, a phone call is also an appropriate way to reach out. Email should be used as a last resort and is better suited to provide follow-up information.
- 3.02 When speaking with the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder for the first time:
  - 3.02.01 Introduce yourself and be very clear about what you want to achieve so they can identify how they can help. Then you can discuss details about their role with the work.
  - 3.02.02 Explain that the College can offer an honorarium or Cultural Knowledge Holder contract to cover expenses, time, and supplies. Be clear about how and when the honorarium and expenses will be paid.
- 3.03 If the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder is not able to give an answer to your request right away, thank them for their consideration and ask them when and how you can reach them to follow-up.
- 3.04 You may have to call them more than once and the Elder may want a family member or support person to be part of the conversation.
- 3.05 Once the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder accepts the request, thank them, set up a meeting to provide more information to them and ask them when and how they would like that to happen.

### **4.00 OFFER A GIFT**

- 4.01 In many First Peoples communities, it is customary to offer a gift when making a request of an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder.
- 4.02 You may want to inquire what their traditional or community protocol is for compensation. For example, it may be appropriate to offer tobacco, wa'uums, mulgwasx', sage or whatever is traditional in their culture, or to provide a small gift outside cultural options, such as items from the CMTN book store.

- 4.03 Inuit Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders do not accept tobacco offerings because they do not use it ceremonially. It is still a kind gesture to provide a small gift though, such as tea.

## **5.00 CLEAR COMMUNICATION**

- 5.01 After the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder has confirmed that they are interested in and available to participate, follow up with a phone call, email or letter that outlines all the details for the event. If you are providing details by email or letter, it is best to follow up by phone to make sure that the Elder/Knowledge Holder received the information, and to gather the details that you need to make the experience as comfortable as possible for them.
- 5.02 The detailed invitation should include:
- 5.02.01 Date, time, and location of the event, including the time you would like them to arrive
  - 5.02.02 A detailed agenda
  - 5.02.03 A description of what exactly is being asked of the Elder/Knowledge Holder
  - 5.02.04 Whether they are being invited to stay and/or participate for the entire event or have the option to leave once their role is complete
  - 5.02.05 Clear information about honorarium and compensation for travel and other expenses
  - 5.02.06 Whether transportation to and from the event will be provided and/or paid for
  - 5.02.07 Whether meals or refreshments will be offered
  - 5.02.08 Information about recording or photography at the event
- 5.03 Information that you will want to collect from the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder, preferably by asking them questions and taking notes:
- Their full name with correct spelling, date of birth and social insurance number (required for accounting purposes)

- Ask them how they would prefer to be addressed (e.g., Traditional or English name; Elder, Cultural Knowledge Holder)
- Whether cheque is an appropriate payment method for the honorarium
- Mailing address for sending honorarium and thank you note
- Phone number and email address (clarify method of communication)
- Transportation needs
- Will they bring along a helper
- Food allergies or aversions
- Do they prefer coffee or tea
- Set-up requirements (e.g., chairs in a circle; a small table for their sacred item; access to water; a room with ventilation for smudging)
- Are they comfortable with their teachings and/or prayers being recorded or photographed? Are there specific moments within that should or should not be recorded or photographed?
- Ask if they have any further questions for you
- Thank them for their time and let them know that you will get in touch a few days before the event to confirm their availability

#### **6.00 FOLLOW-UPS**

Follow-up one week before the event, and again the day before the event to make sure that the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder is still available and that they have everything that they need to make it to the event. Be prepared for the possibility they may not attend due to unforeseen circumstances. In these instances, you can contact the Indigenous Relations and Executive Advisor to determine whether or not another person is available.

#### **7.00 RESPECTFUL CARE**

It is an honour to take care of a visiting Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder. By making sure they are warmly welcomed and respectfully cared for, you are ensuring that First Peoples knowledge transfer can continue.

There are many details that go into making the experience comfortable and seamless for the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder. These include, but are not limited to:

- Assigning a host/helper

- Handling sacred items in a respectful way
- Having payment and a thank you gift ready the day of the event

## **8.00 ASSIGNING A HELPER**

It is important to assign a helper to be a point of contact for the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder. A Helper can be either a College employee or a student.

The role of the helper is to greet the Elder/Knowledge Holder when they arrive, take care of their needs while at the event, and to make sure that they get safely to their next destination.

Details for the helper to consider include:

- Ensuring appropriate transportation to and from the event
- Greeting and meeting the Elder/Knowledge Holder upon arrival
- Showing them to the event space and pointing out the closest washroom
- Asking if they would like refreshments, e.g., water, tea, or coffee
- Checking in to see that they are comfortable
- Organizing a quiet space for them to rest in between engagements, if necessary
- Double-checking about protocols for photography and recording
- Having payment and thank you note ready to present to them before they leave

## **9.00 CARE AND ATTENTION**

9.01 The host or helper should be close by, alert and able to anticipate the needs of the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder. If the host/helper needs to leave for any length of time, they should hand off helping responsibilities to someone or else let the Elder/Knowledge Holder know how they can be reached.

9.02 By being a good helper, you are demonstrating respect for the reverence First Peoples have for their Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders.

## **10.00 HELPER ACCOMPANIES ELDER**

In some cases, Elders may be accompanied by an “Elder’s Helper.” This person will have an established relationship with the Elder and will be available to assist the Elder with whatever they need. Nevertheless, a host/helper should still greet and show them around campus and make sure they both have what they need.

## **11.00 HANDLING SACRED ITEMS IN A RESPECTFUL WAY**

- 11.01 Often Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders will carry sacred items, such as hand drums, rattles, eagle feathers, talking sticks, or medicine bundles. They might also be wearing regalia or other clothing items of spiritual or ceremonial significance. **Always ask permission before touching or picking up a sacred item or cultural clothing piece** and respectfully seek clarification if there is something you do not understand. Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders are often very open to teaching about their items if time permits.
- 11.02 One of the sacred symbols that an Inuk Elder/Knowledge Holder might carry are face or hand tattoos. It should be noted that it is not considered respectful to ask about the meaning of their tattoos as they are very personal, and their stories are only shared in certain circumstances.

## **12.00 HAVING PAYMENT AND THANK YOU GIFT READY**

- 12.01 In most First Peoples cultures, it is customary to provide a gift at the end of the event to show appreciation for the knowledge the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder shared. Historically, food, clothing, and other necessities were provided in exchange for their help and guidance. Contemporary gifts can be practical items placed in tote bags such as blankets, shawls, notebooks, tea set, towels, or local medicines such as Labrador tea and cedar.
- 12.02 In addition to this offering it is also necessary to provide monetary compensation and to communicate the amount of the payment to the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder in advance of the event. It is very important to make sure that the honorarium is paid in person the day of the event unless otherwise instructed by the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder.
- 12.03 It is also good practice to cover the cost of travel, transportation, parking, mileage, meals, accommodation, or any other expenses that an Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder might incur while visiting.

### **13.00 TIMELY FOLLOW-UP WITH ELDER OR CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDER**

After the event has ended and the Elder or Cultural Knowledge Holder is safely at home, it is important to follow-up to close the line of communication that was opened when you first contacted them. If you have not already done so, you can do this by mailing a thank you note, sending an email, or making a phone call. If you are contacting them by phone or email, ask them about their experience and if there was anything that you could have done differently. Use the opportunity to provide them with feedback as well. Lastly, ask whether the Elder/Knowledge Holder would be interested in coming to future events at the College and if it is okay to keep their contact information.