



GUIDE

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INDIGENOUS

PROTOCOL



Ways to share this eBook

Here are a few suggestions on how you could share this eBook with colleagues and/or visitors to your office:

- print a copy and leave it on the table in your break room
- pin it to a notice board
- post it to your website internet and intranet
- add it to the reading material in your waiting room
- take a copy with you if you are working remotely or visiting a field office

Guidebook to Indigenous Protocol

Chapter 1 Land Acknowledgement Protocol

Chapter 2 Elder Protocol

Chapter 3 Talking Stick Protocol

Chapter 4 Potlatch Protocol

Chapter 5 Powwow Protocol

Chapter 6 Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

About the Author

Hi there, I'm Bob Joseph, a certified Master Trainer and founder of Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. Through my more than 20 years of providing training I have helped thousands upon thousands of individuals and organizations work more effectively with Indigenous Peoples.

I believe that by sharing knowledge and information through training and free resources, such as this ebook and our blog, that we can make the world a better place for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

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Indigenous Protocols

One of the big concerns when beginning to work with and engage with Indigenous Peoples and communities is inadvertently causing offence. And, as Canada moves along the path to reconciliation, more and more organizations and individuals are looking for information to assist them with their professional and personal goals for reconciliation.

So, we decided to put together a handbook that outlines some protocols surrounding land acknowledgement, how to respectfully invite an elder to speak at an event, what to expect if a talking stick is introduced in a meeting, how to be a respectful witness at a potlatch, what not to do when at a powwow, and how to benefit from your Indigenous cultural holiday.

CHAPTER 1

Land Acknowledgement Protocol

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

As an Indigenous person, it's part of my culture when visiting the land of another person to acknowledge it as such. It's tradition. The long struggle by First Nations to maintain traditions has been tough, but through it, all this basic protocol has survived and thrived.

Since I began delivering Indigenous relations training in 1994 I have included information in my **training sessions** on why it's important for non-Indigenous people to acknowledge whose traditional or treaty land you are on at the beginning of meetings, conferences etc. It was a relatively new concept back then. Not so much anymore though.

It is very exciting to hear how that simple gesture of respect is now being embraced in so many sectors in Canada. It is being done at the beginning of some **sporting events**, at the start of the day in many school districts, and at the public screenings at the **Toronto International Film Festival**.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

It is one of many critical components of reconciliation and is part of the awareness and change continuum. A formal land acknowledgement shows your recognition of and respect for Indigenous Peoples and their lands, in the context of the past, present, and future.

Including an acknowledgement shows your awareness that you're on the land of a Nation that has had a relationship since time immemorial with that **land**. It is a sign of respect and recognition, and you can't go wrong with respect and recognition. You are acknowledging the ties the descendants of those First Peoples have to the land - its importance to their culture, ceremonies, and traditions.

An informed acknowledgement is authentic, accurate, respectful, and spoken with heartfelt sincerity. It is not a platitude. The exercise of doing the research to find out on whose land a meeting or event is taking place is an opportunity to open hearts and minds to the past and make a commitment to contributing to a better future which is the essence of reconciliation.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

But, where do you begin?

“Can you tell us whose land our meeting is on?” is a frequent request we receive. While we would love to make your life easier by providing the information, we would be hindering your journey to understanding and learning about Indigenous Peoples - reconciliation.

While we wholeheartedly endorse and encourage the formal recognition of traditional and/or treaty lands, we also believe that doing the research necessary to find the answer is part of the awareness continuum. Learning about the Indigenous Peoples in your area of interest will enhance your understanding. If we were to provide the answer then the action of acknowledgement would be degraded to mere lip service or something is done for appearance's sake.

In this ebook, we provide some resources to assist you in your research, some guidelines on protocol, what should be included in the acknowledgement, and who should do the acknowledgement.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The first step is determining the type of lands you are meeting on - treaty lands or traditional territory.

The traditional territory is as it sounds - lands that have been used for all kinds of traditional purposes. And treaty territory is as it sounds - lands that have been defined through **treaty** negotiations, either in a historic Indian treaty-making process or through modern treaties.

Both usually, but not always, have an accompanying map that shows the boundaries.

But, sometimes it's not so easy to determine on whose traditional or treaty land you'll be meeting on. We have collected some resources for you.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

If you are planning a meeting with a community then there is a likelihood that you are coordinating with someone from that community. These points of contact can be a great resource for you. A simple question like, "we/I am/are looking forward to the upcoming meeting. Can I ask for your help in preparing proper protocol? We are trying our best to be respectful but realize we have lots to learn." This approach can also help if you are questioning about bringing gifts.

We also suggest you find the nearest Friendship Centre and ask them. The National Association of Friendship Centres' website links 118 Friendship Centres plus seven provincial and territorial associations. (nafc.ca)

The Canadian University Teachers Association has developed a comprehensive and useful 28 page Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory. (caut.ca)

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

NativeLand.ca

Another ambitious mapping project, that comes with this disclaimer:

"This map does not represent or intend to represent official or legal boundaries of any Indigenous nations. To learn about definitive boundaries, contact the nations in question. Also, this map is not perfect -- it is a work in progress with tons of contributions from the community. Please send us fixes if you find errors."

Google Maps

Announced in June 2017 they were undertaking a project that would add 3,000 Canadian indigenous reserves and settlement lands to Google Maps and Google Earth platforms.

First Nation Profiles

On this interactive site, you can learn general information on First Nations such as the official name of the Nation, the province they are located in, the population, election system, name of the chief, the mailing address as well as links to the Nation's website if they have one.

On the next page, are some protocol guidelines for your consideration.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

During your research, you may find that some communities have protocol guidelines on their website.

You might also find that some organizations have protocol guidelines for you to follow if you are having a meeting or hosting an event within their bounds.

Tip:

Generally speaking, you should restrict your acknowledgement to thanking the host nation, and not stray into welcoming delegates, meeting participants. . . and offending the host Nation and embarrassing yourself and your team in the process.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

What to include in the acknowledgement?

There are different tiers of acknowledgements and which one you use depends on the size of the meeting or event.

- The first tier is a simple acknowledgement of the treaty or traditional land and the people whose history is tied to that land.
- In the next tier, the associated Indigenous culture is included in the opening to the meeting or event.
- The ultimate acknowledgement involves incorporating Indigenous people into the design of the opening and event.

Here are two very basic, first tier examples to get you started:

Land Acknowledgement Protocol on First Nations Traditional Territory

I would like to thank the _____ for agreeing to meet with us today and for welcoming us to your traditional territory.

Land Acknowledgement Protocol on First Nations treaty lands

I would like to thank the _____ for agreeing to meet with us today and for welcoming us to your treaty lands.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

If your meeting or event is in British Columbia, you could include recognition that the land is unceded territory. British Columbia is unique in Canada in that most of the province (an area that's about 95 per cent of the land base, or nearly 900,000 square kilometres) is **unceded**, non-surrendered First Nation territories.

There are other signs of this form of acknowledgement and respect being included in simple but powerful gestures. Page Two Strategies (pagetwostrategies.com), a company I am working with on a couple of **books**, has this on their Contact Us page:

We are grateful to live and work on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō, and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

The Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable lists the Territory Acknowledgement right up on the navigation bar, hosting it on a stand-alone page on the site.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

Here is a sample email signature to get you started:

Bob Joseph President Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

Toll Free: 1 (888) 986-4055

Sent from the traditional territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation.

I have gone with this version as the Kwikwetlem First Nation does not have a treaty. Had they had a treaty, I would have used the following version:

Bob Joseph President Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

Toll Free: 1 (888) 986-4055

Sent from the treaty territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation

Other ways to acknowledge whose territory you are on is to add it to your business card. Additionally, you can add it to your social media profiles, which is increasing in frequency.

My hope is that by doing so others will be inspired to do the same and it eventually will encompass all who consider reconciliation an essential part of everyday life.

It's quite likely in your research, once you are attuned to noticing it, you will come across a variety of examples. Some will be short and simple while others will be more expansive. It's up to you which words to choose and how deep you want to go.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

Who does the acknowledgement?

You can do it or you can invite someone from the community to do it.

If you're doing it, and are unsure of how to pronounce a nation's name, here are some suggestions:

- Calling the band office and asking someone there to help you might seem like a good idea but in reality, as it may take more than a few minutes for you to nail the pronunciation that means you might be imposing on the staff. You could contact the band office and ask if there is someone you could employ to help you and your team with pronunciation.
- The local Friendship Centre is another place to ask for assistance.
- The Nation's website may have a phonetic pronunciation; check out any videos on the website as there may be a reference to the Nation
- My "go to" suggestion is to call the band office after hours and listen to the answering machine. That way you can take as long as needed to nail your pronunciation.

Please **practice**, practice, practice until you are comfortable with your pronunciation as you don't often get credit for just trying.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

What about land acknowledgement protocol for meetings on reserves? Should you or should you not, as a guest on a reserve, thank the host Nation?

If you are holding a meeting on a reserve then you definitely should thank the host Nation for allowing you to hold the meeting. If a previous speaker has done the acknowledgement when it is your turn to speak you could begin with "I too would like to acknowledge the Nations on whose territory we are in, and express my thanks for this opportunity to meet here today." If you are not the first speaker and none of the previous speakers has done the acknowledgement then, by all means, acknowledge the host communities. You could always add that you feel privileged to be there.

Of course, there are exceptions given the diversity of cultures and regions so on the next page we share a couple of exceptions that come to mind.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

Exception #1:

Consider the scenario where a First Nation has been relocated out of its own territory and into another First Nations territory. What should we do in such a case?

I would encourage some research first to see if the First Nations neighbours have worked out a protocol greeting sorting this issue out. I would even go as far as asking meeting organizers for advice. In the absence of information, I would go with something along the lines of "I would like to thank X First Nations for the invitation to meet in the community here today and acknowledge this shared territory we are meeting in."

Exception #2:

Consider the scenario in which traditional territory issues are still being sorted out in places such as Vancouver. In the Vancouver area, you have a number of First Nations living in very close proximity to each other, in their traditional territories but without treaties. As a matter of treaty making policy, it has been decided that overlaps should be worked out amongst the involved parties. This work hasn't been done yet so what is a practitioner to do? Research suggests there is a protocol in place where the practitioner would acknowledge the meeting as it takes place in Coast Salish territory. All of the communities we are talking about are Coast Salish so it is a nice way to acknowledge without causing internal problems.

CHAPTER 2

Elder Protocol

Elder Protocol

If you're going to invite an **elder** to conduct a land acknowledgement it is extremely important that they are treated with respect and their needs are seen to before, during, and after the ceremony.

Here are some guidelines and suggestions on elder protocol.

When contacting the band office here are the questions to ask:

- Name of elder
- Spelling of name
- How they should be addressed
- Contact information

It is customary to provide an honorarium to the elder:

- Never ask the elder
- The honoraria should be ascertained beforehand - keep in mind that you are asking to impose a monetary value on a sacred ceremony
- The honoraria respect the value of what the elder is offering

Travel arrangements:

- Be prepared to cover travelling costs (do you need to send a car or taxi to pick them up)
- Will they be travelling on their own or with someone
- Name of their travelling companion and whether or not that person requires payment and expect to cover their travel costs as well

Elder Protocol

Food & beverages:

Find out in advance if the elder has allergies, dietary requirements if they are invited to stay for breakfast, lunch or dinner

In some cultures it is customary for the elder to be served their food, and maybe even first; it is definitely a must if the elder has mobility challenges and can't carry a plate of food while using a walking stick

Some elders will not participate in events where alcohol is being served; be sure to include this information when extending the invitation.

When contacting an elder, remember that a phone call is better than a letter. Elders often rely more on the **spoken word** than the written word. Do not contact them months in advance and then leave it at that. Contact them again a few weeks in advance and then again a few days in advance. Be prepared that they may have to cancel due to community events or health issues. If that is the case, contact the community again and ask for their advice on inviting another elder.

Elders may include **smudging** as part of the acknowledgement so ensure the facility is alerted in advance.

Elder Protocol

At the expected time of arrival, have someone at the front door of the building to greet the elder and their travelling companion. Do not assume that they will shake hands. As you are introducing yourself wait to see if they offer their hand. If they do, do not squeeze their hands - do not apply any pressure greater than what they provide; expect it to be a soft hand that you shake and you will be fine. Be sure to let the person who will be introducing and thanking the elder know about handshaking considerations.

At large events consider having a quiet room where the elder can prepare for the smudge or blessing, rest after travelling or before returning to their home. Also, have a snack and a drink available upon their arrival or if it is midday or evening, plan to have a meal available.

- During the ceremony, everyone stands, hats removed, heads' bowed, hands by side or clasped in front.
- Don't sit down until you are sure the elder has finished speaking.
- Do not talk, text or take phone calls during the ceremony.
- Be in the moment and ask the group or audience to also be in the moment.

CHAPTER 3

Talking Stick Protocol

Talking Stick Protocol

The Talking stick, used in many but not all Indigenous cultures, is an ancient and powerful “communication tool” that ensures a code of conduct of respect during meetings is followed. The person holding the stick, and only that person, is designated as having the right to speak and all others must listen quietly and respectfully.

Talking sticks are most frequently used in council circles, ceremonies and at the beginning of cultural events such as potlatches, and in storytelling circles. Some cultures do not use a talking stick per se but use an eagle feather, wampum belt, peace pipe, or sacred shell.

A great many schools have adopted the talking stick principles in their classrooms as a way to teach children patience, self-discipline and to respect the speaker and his/her words. The added bonus is the children additionally are learning about Indigenous culture in a tangible way.

In terms of talking stick protocols, it is important to remember that each Indigenous community is unique in their culture, traditions, and history so will have their own protocols. In this ebook, we are speaking of general protocols.

Talking Stick Protocol

If you invited to attend a meeting that involves a talking stick, either ask about protocol in advance and/or follow the lead of others. Here are some basic rules that if you follow you won't go far wrong:

- If an elder is present, they speak first
- All in attendance are expected to listen
- Listen with respect, support, compassion, and stillness
- Listen carefully - do not repeat information that has already been shared
- Allow ample time before your next appointment - do not check your watch
- Turn off your phone and don't look at your watch
- Interrupting is not allowed
- When the elder, or whomever, is holding the talking stick has finished speaking, the stick is handed to the next person in the circle
- If the receiver does not wish to speak, it is passed to the next person
- If you are handed the Talking Stick and wish to speak, introduce yourself first
- When everyone who wishes to speak has spoken, the Talking Stick is handed back to the elder for safekeeping

Talking Stick Protocol

Consider bringing a gift of tobacco for any elders who may be in attendance

Talking sticks can be elaborately carved, brightly painted, unpainted, adorned with symbolic items such as fur, leather, feathers or unadorned and simple - the wood, the figures, the colours and the adornments all carry meaning but more on symbolism in another article.

Kinda makes one wish our politicians used the talking stick and time honoured protocols to guide their meetings.

CHAPTER 4

Potlatch Protocol

Potlatch Protocol

If you are fortunate enough to be invited to a **potlatch**, consider it an honour and privilege as you have been asked to witness a ceremony that has its roots in the far distant past. The ceremony has survived and thrived despite the best efforts of the Canadian government to legislatively assimilate Indigenous Peoples and destroy their culture.

From 1884 to 1951, the *Indian Act* prohibited First Nations from participating in the potlatch, the Sundance, and all other similar cultural ceremonies across Canada. To many (not all) west coast First Nations, the ceremony is an institution central to the culture, governance, and spiritual essence of the people, combining the processes of government, court, and church.

The most important recommendation that I can make is to follow house rules. You are a guest in their house so follow their rules. If in doubt about an aspect ask the person who invited you for clarification and direction. Another good way to prepare would be to do some reading about potlatches.

Over the next couple of pages we have some important protocols for you to keep in mind.

Potlatch Protocol

- Commit to attend the entire event
- Do not arrive late
- Don't invite people to accompany you without clearing it first with your host - the planners have to maintain a head count
- Ask your host how you can support the event in order to show your gratitude for being invited
- Don't sit in the first row of bleachers or chairs as these are reserved for Elders and dignitaries
- Do not reach over the heads of the Elders and or dignitaries seated in the first row to receive or pass objects
- Don't bring your own food - sharing of food by the hosts is an important aspect
- Do not leave your seat while dancers and singers are performing, or during announcements - the same rules of respect apply to potlatches as they do to symphonies and ballet performances
- Don't talk during the performances or while the Speaker is making announcements
- Listen carefully to the Speaker to learn the rules; announcements are generally made first in the traditional language and then repeated in English
- Do not refer to the regalia as costumes
- Do not touch the regalia
- Some ceremonies and dances are not to be photographed - respect that protocol. Ask if it is permissible to share photos with friends.
- Do not share the photos on social media

Potlatch Protocol

Some additional thoughts on potlatch protocol:

Gift giving is part of the ceremony and it is rude and disrespectful to decline a gift.

Some cultural food is incredibly rich in flavour and not for every palate. Sharing food is an important aspect of a potlatch and it would be a serious faux pas if you were to decline to participate in the meals. The best thing you can do is join in, perhaps not load your plate, and if asked how you like it, with your poker face on say, "Mmm, this is some of the best I have ever tasted."

If you have dietary or religious restrictions, it's smart to inform the person who invites you at the time of invitation. You could say, "I am honoured to be invited but I just can't participate in the meal/feast. Is it all right if I still attend?"

If you are a non-Indigenous person, expect to be the minority and be comfortable in that role.

Expect to be emotionally moved as potlatches are spiritual, dramatic, and beautiful.

CHAPTER 5

Powwow Protocol

Powwow Protocol

Many Powwows are open to the public and are a wonderful opportunity for non-Indigenous people to experience the richness of an Indigenous traditional gathering. If you have never attended one, there are some protocols that must be respected. However, please keep in mind protocols vary from region to region so it's a good idea to find one of the organizers and ask if you are unsure about something.

Historically, powwows were occasions for nations, families and friends to gather, dance, share news, food, celebrate, trade, and sometimes do a bit of matchmaking. Long distances were often travelled in order to attend so they often lasted for a week; some still do although as with many cultural events, the duration has been truncated to fit within a weekend or long weekend in order to accommodate work and school schedules.

The term powwow, unfortunately, was picked up by those great purveyors of misinformation about Indigenous Peoples... the Western movie. Through this medium the term has become a **colloquialism** to describe any type of meeting; this usage is disrespectful and should be avoided.

On the next page we share some protocols you should be aware of before attending a powwow.

Powwow Protocol

Regalia: some of the articles are extremely old, some are sacred and they all take an extremely long time to make - do not touch without asking permission; don't refer to regalia as costumes.

Drums: the drum is the heartbeat of a pow wow, and some drums have traditions that dictate it can never be left unattended. Do not attempt to play or touch without permission; "Drum" also refers to the group of performers who play the instrument, such as the "host drum".

Photographs: never take a picture of a dancer without first asking his or her permission, however, it is generally acceptable to take pictures of the dances. If in doubt, find an organizer and ask. Often, if a sacred event is taking place, the MC will announce that photos are not permitted.

Sound recordings: again, permission must be sought before recording; Grand Entry: always stand during the Grand Entry, which opens the powwow - the Eagle Staff is the lead, followed by flags, usually carried by Indigenous war veterans, then the dancers; other events may also require the audience to stand but the MC will make the announcement.

Alcohol: strictly forbidden.

Powwows are joyous, inclusive celebrations - if there is one near you, consider attending for an opportunity to be swept up in the music, the ambience, the history, and to learn about Indigenous culture.

CHAPTER 6

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing tourism markets globally. The urge to experience another culture or learn about another culture are common motivations of a great many tourists. In Canada, the uptick in Indigenous-led wildlife tours and community-based cultural experiences reflects the growth in this market. Both domestic and international tourists are increasingly drawn to Indigenous culture. And, Indigenous communities are organizing and capitalizing on this interest:

“There are more than 1,500 Indigenous-led tourism organizations...Collectively, they employ over 33,000 people, generate \$67 million in consumption tax revenue, and contribute \$1.4 billion towards Canada’s annual GDP” [1]

The significance of “Indigenous-led” organizations needs to be looked at as a giant step forward. No longer are Indigenous Peoples and their cultures objects of interest in the tourist trade - they are the operators and as such, they manage which aspects of their culture are shared and which are held back.

[1] The Aboriginal Business Report, A New Day for Indigenous Tourism, Sept. 2018, p 15

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

The many benefits of cultural tourism include:

- Provides sustainable economic opportunities. Some Indigenous communities are remotely located with few opportunities for economic development
- Supports local entrepreneurs
- Creates employment, especially for youth
- Brings in new money which boosts the local economy, businesses and tax revenues
- Brings in new money which can be used for community amenities such as cultural centres, carving sheds, and studios
- Builds community pride
- Strengthens **connection to culture** and **land**
- Contributes to the preservation of culture and traditions by providing the resources necessary to maintain the skills and traditions. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognizes intangible cultural heritage as of equal importance as buildings: "Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations."
- Expands awareness of Indigenous culture and the importance of preservation
- Builds connections with people from outside the community which contributes to reconciliation

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

The challenges cultural tourism face includes:

- Promoting and developing authentic cultural experiences without commodifying their culture
- Protecting heritage and **sacred sites**
- Not falling prey to over-commercialization

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

Here are some tips and suggestions for you to keep in mind:

There are Indigenous cultural experiences in every province and territory. If your holiday plans include a cultural experience and you're really keen to get the most out of your trip consider taking our online **Indigenous Awareness** course so that you understand the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the roots of some of the challenges and **issues** impacting Indigenous Peoples.

- Adopt the view that you are a guest in the community and that you are there to learn about, honour, and respect their traditions and culture. Indigenous Peoples have **struggled** long and hard to preserve their culture
- If you are unsure of what is and is not appropriate, ask your guide
- Choose your words. Here's a **list of terms** to avoid
- Be cautious about asking questions about potentially sensitive subjects such as divisive resource development projects, issues in the news, politics etc. Instead, keep your questions related to the culture of the community you are visiting. You can learn a lot by just listening
- Don't expect or try to hold **eye contact** when chatting with your guide or community members

Indigenous Cultural Tourism Protocol

Here are some more tips and suggestions for you to keep in mind:

- Don't expect to **shake hands**. Wait to see if a hand is offered first. If so, keep the pressure gentle especially if the other person is an **elder**. Shaking hands is not a competitive sport
- If there are culturally or ecologically sensitive areas that are forbidden to visitors, respect that rule
- Be socially conscious. If you are planning to visit an open to the public sacred site do some research on how the associated community feels about the public touching and taking photos of the site
- Ask if there are rules about photography
- Alcohol may be forbidden which means strict adherence to this rule. **Alcohol** has had a destructive impact on some Indigenous people and communities
- Be aware of dress codes. If, for example, you are invited to a sweat lodge ceremony, be aware that in many Indigenous cultures, women are required to wear long skirts for the sweat. Find out in advance and pack accordingly.

If you are informed, respectful, and grateful for the opportunity to experience Indigenous culture, then you can't go wrong.



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