

## APPROACH

# Community Engagement Event Planning



No matter how much value you think a program or initiative will bring to an Indigenous community, organization or business, or how much investment has gone into a project that will affect Indigenous community in some way, your organization will need to gain the trust of Indigenous actors, demonstrating the legitimacy and value proposition of the project.



Credit: Tiaré Jung (Drawing Change), 15th Annual Indigenous Comprehensive Community Planning Workshop

Whether planning a community consultation for a research project or a co-design process or a participatory evaluation, the quality and success of the engagement event for both the community and your initiative will depend very much on the trust and relationship building that have been initiated prior to the event. It will also depend on the value proposition and/or demonstrated benefit being offered to the Indigenous actors you are seeking to engage.

## Education and research prior to engagement

Prior to and in the early stages of engagement, organizations need to devote some time and attention to educating themselves about the particular contexts, priorities and cultural protocols of the Nation/community. You need to understand the people and communities you are engaging with. It is also respectful to have a comfortable understanding of their history and cultural values, practices and celebrations. Your first meeting is also an opportunity to ask about protocols (e.g. opening prayers, tobacco, gifts, and opportunities to speak).

To create a community profile and preliminary environmental scan, ensure that you research the Nation/community and governing structures you wish to engage before doing outreach to the community for your organization. A community profile will often include the following elements:

- Indigenous rights frameworks and local governing structures.
- Who will benefit and how from the initiative?
- What are their protocols of engagement?

- Identify strengths and assets for the community.
- Identify challenges and constraints for the community.

Collection of information on these elements and other valuable learning about the community will often be based primarily on desktop research, but can include first-hand information gathering through relevant network contacts and organizations. Research topics that will provide an initial community profile and help your organization identify important information such as community needs and priorities, capacities and challenges, relevant initiatives, partnerships and local structures:

- Cultural values and principles
- Community profiles and statistics
- Publicly available strategic reports and assessments
- Fishing, hunting and gathering activities
- Ceremonial activities
- Tribal council affiliations
- Treaty office affiliations
- Community priorities
- Date of next band election
- Media coverage of any issues
- Past agreements - written or verbal

## Questions to get started

- **Goals:** What level of engagement do you hope to achieve? Have you invited engagement into the initial stages of the project (i.e. visioning and planning)?
  - Can you parse engagement activities and process into stages that can shift and evolve as the relationship develops?
- **Strategy:** Relationship-building is key to successful engagement, partnerships and collaborative projects.
  - Who will lead communications and relationship building with the community?
  - Who will oversee cultural awareness learning and researching the Nation, territory and the community context?
  - What tactics will you use to ensure success?
- **Tracking and evaluation:** a clear map of communications, impacts, best practices, and lessons learned will be helpful for short and long-term planning of the project.

## ]Considerations for planning a meeting or event<sup>1</sup>

- **Purpose and objectives** – are you clear about why you are engaging with Indigenous peoples?
  - Why are you seeking Indigenous perspectives/content and what are your expectations for doing so?
  - How will you present those perspectives/content and how will you give space for them?
  - Do you have support for the level of engagement you are proposing?
- **Focus** – have you considered all relevant Indigenous voices on the matter?
  - Whose voices have you invited and have you left any out?
  - Are there overlapping interests on the issues(s) among Indigenous people?
  - Ask those you hope to engage whether there are other people whom you should consider inviting to the table. This will help you better understand traditional social structures.
- **Collaboration/ Audience** – Who needs to be there and what are their roles?
  - Level of participation and collaboration should be clearly articulated and should be valuable for Indigenous actors.
- E.g. Active and ongoing engagement is more valuable for community actors vs. passive participation
- Who is your audience?
  - What do you want your audience to do at the event?
  - What do you want your audience to do after the event?
- **Agenda** – Try to co-develop agenda items with community leads. Be clear about the items on the agenda and set out and respect time allotted to each item.
- **Timing & Scheduling** – timing can be perceived differently by Indigenous and civic partners and should be as flexible as possible.
  - Having an event scheduled at the same time as another community event can cause distraction and the loss of focus for your particular initiative; you may not receive the response you're looking for.
  - It may be prudent to schedule an event ahead of or soon after another regional or local event, especially if you are inviting participants from across a larger geographic area.
  - Travel costs are often high in many rural and remote regions and/or transportation may be complicated for some communities.
  - If they are already coming to an urban or hub area for an event, then they may be more available to attend your organization's event.

<sup>1</sup> - Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. (n.d.). First Nations Communications Toolkit.

- **Location** – deciding where to hold an event is another important strategic decision that should be aligned with the realities and considerations for Indigenous participants.
  - While many Indigenous organizations, companies and professionals are often based in cities, engagement of non-urban communities will be a priority if they are impacted by the initiative and/or their consultation is required for a project.
  - As much as possible, events should be planned in community, or in a central location within the region that would be accessible to the different communities and practitioners you wish to engage.
  - Ensure that the facility is in an accessible location for community.
- **Facilitation** – a facilitator or strong chairperson is essential to the effective management of your meeting.
  - Co-facilitation with, or facilitation by a community leader could enhance wider community engagement and ensure more balanced perspectives.
- **Opening/closing** – Identify an Indigenous Elder/knowledge-keeper to offer a traditional welcome and closing (may include a traditional prayer, song and medicines).
- **Land Acknowledgement** – identify someone from the organization to share a respectful and genuine acknowledgement of the host community, lands, First Peoples, relationships and agreements where the event is taking place.
- **Question and Answer period** – ensure there is enough time for people to have the opportunity to ask questions.
- **Catering** – identify community caterers and account for dietary needs.
- **Supporting materials and resources** – provide relevant materials that support the objectives of the event in advance (where possible) or during the event.
- **Media** – determine if it is desirable to have local or national media (if so provide media kits).
- **Event follow up** – identify next steps and how information will be shared following the event.
- **Other considerations** – budget, catering, security and transportation.



Credit: Evergreen