

TOOL

Guiding Protocols for Civic-Indigenous Engagement



Although protocols have a strictly procedural and guidance function in many contexts, in Indigenous cultures they are considered sacred. Protocols are intentional agreements between Elders and knowledge-keepers, community members, the land and the Creator within a ceremony, practice or process. In fact, protocol is the backbone of ceremony, governance and cultural practice and includes the following elements that reinforce trust, reciprocal relationships, knowledge-sharing and community-building:

- Honouring the living memory of ancestors.
- Honouring the land and place.
- Honouring the knowledge of Elders, community leaders and those who know.

As recent as 1951, most First Nations, Inuit, and Métis/Michif ceremonies were legally banned in Canada. After that, changes in the Indian Act enabled the performance of ceremonies and use of regalia without

interference and threat of lawful punishment. Due to the tireless efforts of many in the Indigenous world to unsettle, creatively disrupt, reclaim and reimagine these cities as Indigenous cities, critically important shifts have happened and we are slowly coming to a place where Indigenous values, models and protocols are finally being acknowledged as important to the future of cities.

This tool is informed by the knowledge, experiences and stories shared by a co-creation circle and a panel of Indigenous thought leaders, artists, architects and activists active in urban placekeeping, creative practice, decolonial action, and reimagining of cities. It is also inspired by many dialogues with and teachings by esteemed Indigenous Elders and knowledge-keepers from across Turtle Island. The protocols featured here are culturally informed, land and place-based protocols that can guide best practice on engagement between civic practitioners, and Indigenous knowledge and expertise in the spaces of placekeeping, urban land stewardship and city building. Some common examples of protocols include:

- Land acknowledgements;
- Guidelines for working with Elders;
- Meaning of and participation guidelines for ceremonies, feasts, pow wows and other cultural activities;
- Planning community engagement events and processes;
- Language;
- Governance regulations and guidelines.

Protocols are intended to guide municipalities and organizations in developing:

- Learning to come together with Indigenous community in shared understanding and respect for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in all matters that relate to Indigenous identity, knowledge and data, land, cultural productions and practices, language and governance.
- Learning how to follow the protocols of those whose land practitioners are working on.
- Cultural competency learning and capacity building with respect to repairing and building relationships
- Deferring to Indigenous leadership and governance, values, knowledges and approaches.
- Community engagement in collaborative design, planning, research, decision making and evaluation processes.
- Reimagining public spaces from Indigenous and intercultural perspectives.
- Building equitable, intentional and committed partnerships with Indigenous community and organizations.

Guiding Civic-Indigenous Engagement through Indigenous cultural and ethical protocols

Most of the following experiences, insights and wisdoms were generously shared by a diversity of Indigenous placekeeping leaders who participated in a workshop aimed at co-creating guidelines based on their experiential and cultural teachings that could inform civic practitioners in their engagement and partnership-building processes with Indigenous community. They are also informed by a number of roundtables and symposia with Indigenous knowledge-keepers and practitioners and civic allies working across different forms of placekeeping and city building. The protocols and teachings offered here are intended to be an initial guide and are not an exhaustive list, nor are they intended to be a representation of pan-Indigenous teachings and protocols. Indigenous teachings and protocols are context-specific and dependent on the particular norms and practices of the particular Nation your organization is engaging, as well as the nature of engagement.

From their particular experiences working with Indigenous communities and partners, participants described the cultural and ethical protocols instrumental to cultivating: Indigenous leadership, self-determination, community specific, deep listening, shared knowledge and benefits, and positive impact (ethical, respectful, ecological, sustainable) in the design, planning and/or decision-making process.

Land and Place-based Protocols

Important to learn and commit to the protocols of the Indigenous nation(s) whose land the initiative is occurring upon but also, the protocols from the land itself. Across Indigenous cultures, the lands, waters, plants and animals are understood to be living beings with their own personhood and rights¹, agency, and wisdom. Under traditional land regimes across diverse Indigenous societies, lands are held in common and cared for and protected under collective or common use regimes. The protocols and responsibilities for how people should relate to, sustainably use and steward land and resource commons come from the Earth and Creator, embodied and enacted through Natural laws and teachings.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can learn the most foundational protocols on placekeeping, care-taking, relationship-building, environmental ethics, respect, justice, and living a good life by listening, observing and being in presence with the forests, rivers and lakes, mountains, plants and animals – even in urban contexts.

- Important for civic and Indigenous partners to explore where Indigenous and settler conceptions of protocol differ and where they overlap. Although conventional protocols and guidelines are very useful in many contexts, Indigenous protocols have deeper layers of intentionality and cultural and relational meaning that can inspire richer forms of community engagement, co-design and reimagining public space.

1 - Examples of Environmental personhood and rights: Rights of Nature, Ecuador Constitution (2008) <<https://therightsofnature.org/ecuador-rights/>>; Whanganui River Settlement, Aotearoa; Ganges and Yamuna rivers, Uttarakhand India; Lake Erie, Ohio, US.

- Indigenous protocols for community engagement and placekeeping are dynamic, alive, and infused by spirit; they are informed by place, relationships with land, place and community, and sharing knowledges and best practices among practitioners and knowledge-keepers.

Language

- Due to their status as sovereign nations, Indigenous peoples are distinct from Canadian communities and municipalities and should not be subsumed under the name 'Canada/Canadian'. Indigenous peoples belong to nations with constitutionally protected rights and therefore have a different status coming to the table of a project or process relative to other stakeholder groups. As such, First Nations, Inuit and Métis should be addressed as partners, collaborators, rights-holders, etc. and not as 'stakeholders' indistinguishable from non-Indigenous collaborators.
- Using monolithic and pan-Indigenous terminology like "the Indigenous culture" or "all Indigenous people" to denote or describe the multiplicity of Indigenous Nations and peoples is not only too broad, but it also negates the hundreds of Indigenous Nations across Canada and their respective communities, cultures, knowledges and experiences. When there is need to refer collectively to First Nations, Métis and Inuit – or when the particular group or Nation is unknown – the plural forms of words are preferred i.e. Indigenous peoples, Indigenous Nations, knowledges and cultures.
- When a person's or community's Nation affiliation is known, it is important to use that instead of always deferring to "Indigenous" or "Native" i.e. the Anishinaabe community of Curve Lake, or "my colleague is Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) from Kahnawà:ke."

- Framing Indigenous experiences and realities as “issues” can have a negative and deficit-orientated connotation that implicitly casts Indigenous community as mired in problems. “Issues” does not also implicitly reflect the self-determination, strengths, resiliency, creativity, solutions, and momentum that also exist in community. Awareness of the limiting terminology that is often used to frame topics through an Indigenous lens is required so that communications and content about and for Indigenous community are in sync with how Indigenous peoples understand their world.
- Awareness is required in municipal regulatory and planning contexts about how concepts such as “allow” and “permission” carry implicit power inequities that cast Indigenous people in a disempowered and disadvantaged position. These terms also extend from Western capitalist notions and legal structures of ownership and control of land, which is in discord with Indigenous peoples’ relationships with land defined by stewardship and collective use responsibilities.
- All communications and messages that are targeted at and/or inclusive of Indigenous community should be culturally sensitive and inclusive. All formal communications and publications should formally acknowledge relevant territories, treaties and protocols. When Indigenous communities and municipal participants are participating in a service or event, Indigenous-focused content should be emphasized.

Ceremony

- Important to recognize the Indigenous ancestry of a place/land as soon as we arrive in that space because all processes and activities should begin from a grounding in land stewardship. By learning and honouring the original caretakers and contemporary stewards, we can honour the lineage of place. As a baseline protocol, all other protocols can then be built from this relational acknowledgement of place².
- Important to acknowledge that the ceremonial and other cultural practices of faith-keepers, knowledge-keepers, Elders and healers are central to placekeeping within each Indigenous Nation and urban community. Space for these practices should always be built into projects and community engagement process and include the following elements:
 - Role of ceremonial facilitation in placekeeping, acknowledging ancestral energies in places.
 - Acknowledging the land and ancestry of a place by holding a piece of earth from that place in their hand – a powerful way of connecting our words and actions.
 - Role of Indigenous placekeeping practitioner as a cultural teacher, mentor and advisor within Indigenous community, and increasingly by non-Indigenous institutions.

² -Teaching given by Cree Elder Joanne Okimawinew Dallaire, Honorary Board Elder at Ryerson University.

- Important to acknowledge the continued relevance and value of oral tradition in different Indigenous cultures and that this form of knowledge collection, dissemination and communication is as valid as written and digital forms. When being told a story, it is important to listen and learn, and not to interrupt with questions or comments until invited to do so after the storyteller has finished speaking. Questions can imply disbelief, which is an insult to the storyteller.

Oral traditions are a living compendium and archival system of the history and knowledge of different nations and families, encoded within ceremonies, creation stories, teachings, relationships, cultural practices, technologies, myths, language, and scientific knowledge. These vast bodies of knowledge and technology have been transmitted intergenerationally through the oral tradition for thousands of years without ever being transcribed.

While written and digital documentation and communication is now very common among Indigenous community, the oral tradition and storytelling continue to be valued and strongly used and should therefore be an accepted form of sharing within a process or project. In fact, the Supreme Court ruling on the Delgamuukw³ case legally acknowledged Indigenous oral history as admissible evidence in Aboriginal rights and titles cases.

- In urban settings, it is important to be aware of those who have been removed and dispersed and then take root as guests in the ancestral lands of other Indigenous peoples, acknowledging their homelands where possible.

3 - On December 11, 1997, a unanimous Supreme Court of Canada handed down its much-studied Delgamuukw judgment, providing some important definition and description of Aboriginal title, affirming the legal validity of Aboriginal oral history, and clarifying the nature of the Crown's duties of consultation and accommodation in the context of infringement of Aboriginal rights.

Engagement

- Engagement and co-design processes with community should take place at the initial visioning and development stages (upstream) and across the design development process rather than seeking approval from them in the latter stages (downstream). Upstream processes include relationship-building, agenda-setting, planning, co-creation and content development; downstream processes include implementation, activation and evaluation.
 - Ensure that Indigenous knowledge, methodology and priorities are written into the DNA of the process or project.
- When engaging community, relationship-building at the pace of trust and consent by community regarding entering into partnership must be central to the process. Also, respect for and openness to incorporating oral tradition, ceremony and land-based teachings into the engagement process are instrumental to building trust and co-creating valuable outcomes for Indigenous and civic partners. The onus is on municipalities and civic organizations to honour the needs communicated by communities; to give them the space and respect to communicate their needs in their own words and their own ways.
- Important to recognize that relationships with community and the quality of the value proposition being offered are vital to any partnership and project, particularly in recognizing and compensating people's capacity to engage and consult on initiatives external to the community. Indigenous knowledge-keepers, practitioners and community leaders are often overwhelmed with requests to advise on or engage in events and initiatives, in addition to the work they do professionally and for their communities.

Civic leaders cannot assume that because an initiative is inclusive of Indigenous content and has community-oriented outcomes, that it will be considered a priority for Indigenous community. Nor can it be assumed that an Indigenous community or organization has the capacity to commit to the initiative.

- It is incumbent on non-Indigenous leadership and staff in civic organizations to understand and commit to their roles as settlers within the reconciliation and righting relationships process with Indigenous community. It is not the role of Indigenous staff to do the work of or absorb responsibility for reconciliation on behalf of settler institutions and leadership.

Awareness of the complex and sometimes uncomfortable role that Indigenous staff must inhabit within civic organizations as they attempt to bridge between Indigenous and settler worldviews and priorities. Governments and institutions may unrealistically expect Indigenous staff to singularly embody and deliver reconciliation commitments – reconciling all institutional gaps and community mistrust, and building strong relationships and program buy-in with community on behalf of the institution. Due to their capacity to navigate between Indigenous and institutional cultures, Indigenous staff are often instrumentalized by civic organizations to legitimize agendas and processes that are not in sync with the values and priorities of Indigenous community. In this scenario, Indigenous staff are put in a compromising position and the organization risks jeopardizing its relationships with Indigenous partners and project outcomes.

- Important to embrace a non-corporate and more organic approach to engagement of Indigenous community in design, planning and governance processes. Processes that are grounded in co-creative/participatory approaches, multiple sources of knowledge and forms of knowledge sharing, and a non-linear understanding of time will

be more in sync with Indigenous methods – making the engagement process more generative and successful for community.

Organizations and funders adhere to predetermined outcomes and stringent timelines for workflow and deliverables, often imposing those expectations on Indigenous community partners. However, when collaborating with community, it is imperative to not pre-define what the process and outcomes are going to be before community partners have been consulted. Predetermining and streamlining an approach is a disservice to Indigenous community as there is no space for them to engage their expertise, experience and priorities in a robust and meaningful way.

Therefore, approaching programs, processes and activities with a respect for the natural timing of relationship-building and creative problem solving makes good sense when working with community. Complex topics and processes need time and space to be processed and resolved in ways that are holistic and hold value for both Indigenous and civic partners. Taking cues from traditional land-based teachings, a seasonal approach to planning around land stewardship and use, design, climate adaptation, innovation, food harvesting, health and service provision has served Indigenous community very well in diverse contexts.

- While checklists of required elements for community engagement and events can be useful entry points and reminders for civic practitioners, it is important to understand that working with communities is not a checklist. Relationship-building and design and planning processes must be organic, co-creative, and deeply and broadly engaging so as to avoid transactional approaches, and outcomes that are impractical or even damaging to Indigenous community.

- Civic partners must learn to be sensitive to the deep levels of trauma and mistrust in Indigenous community that stem from the impacts of colonialism, genocide and physical and cultural dislocation. It will take generations of healing and engagement work to overcome centuries of colonization and contemporary social and environmental injustices experienced by Indigenous community and territories. Community and the people themselves are their own greatest strengths and tools in terms of overcoming barriers and rebuilding their nations. Active listening, patience and flexibility are necessary qualities of the engagement process because community members will best articulate their needs and priorities when they feel the trust and confidence to do so.

Guiding Principles

Cultural Competency

- Developing Indigenous cultural competency at individual and organizational levels is imperative to building respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous peoples, and co-creating initiatives that will be relevant and responsive to, and informed by Indigenous knowledges and priorities. Cultural competency requires ongoing awareness and self-reflection regarding personal world-views and attitudes toward cultural differences, as well as awareness of settler privilege and unequal power dynamics. It includes both knowledge of, and openness to, the cultural and social realities and contexts of the particular Indigenous communities and groups that are being engaged.
- Indigenous cultural competency does not require non-Indigenous people to become experts in Indigenous cultures, but it does require

the ability to enter into the cultural worlds and realities of Indigenous peoples in order to cultivate understanding and compassion. Cultural competency also requires developing a level of understanding and proficiency in culturally specific protocols and knowledge systems commensurate with the scope of the partnership and initiative.

- Competency in intercultural awareness relates particularly to the interaction between diverse Indigenous and settler cultures and approaches through engagement and partnership processes that are based in mutual respect, fairness and equality, collaboration, co-creation and reciprocity. It also requires in-depth learning and critical self-reflection regarding complex concepts such as colonialism, race, racism, culture; commitment to challenging stereotypes and cultural biases; and learning how to become better allies and champions of Indigenous leadership and models.
- Cultural competency requires the following considerations by municipalities and civic organizations:
 - Commitment by organizational leadership to support Indigenous cultural competency, inclusion and leadership across the organization.
 - Inclusive and comprehensive cultural competency training and immersive cultural experiences led by Indigenous knowledge-keepers and professionals.
 - Reviewing and developing organizational policies for cultural competency and protocols and research ethics and/or data sovereignty with Indigenous staff and partners.
 - Articulating a clear and accessible conflict resolution and grievances process.

- Fostering a commitment to evaluation, reporting, and continuous improvement of cultural competency and safety across the organization.
- Making efforts to ensure the organization representatively includes Indigenous staff across all levels.
- Enlist knowledge-keepers and Elders as mentors, educators and advisors to guide and monitor cultural protocols and activities.
- Making efforts to ensure the organization hires Indigenous consultants and/or engages Indigenous partners (with appropriate compensation) where there are gaps in internal capacity and expertise on Indigenous programming, content development and initiatives.
- Ensuring organizational environments, programs and services reflect local Indigenous cultures and priorities.

Organization-wide Indigenous Inclusion & Reconciliation Actions

- Develop an organizational Indigenous engagement and transformative reconciliation policy in partnership with Indigenous staff and partners; and a plan to integrate commitments through policies, processes and actions.
- Promote and implement relevant Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to actions and principles from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) across the organization and work collectively to advocate for systemic change at municipal and community levels.

- Develop an Indigenous hiring and retention strategy with targets and performance tracking for Indigenous employment and leadership.
- Hiring of Indigenous staff and consultants to lead the co-creation and co-ownership of initiatives that impact Indigenous community (urban and rural) in direct and indirect ways.
- Build and cultivate a network of local and national Indigenous partners through relationships based on trust, respect and reciprocity.
- Appropriately remunerate and credit Indigenous practitioners and knowledge-keepers for their expertise and time when inviting their participation as knowledge partners in events and advisory committees.
- Create safe space for Indigenous staff, partners, community members and participants at meetings, events, activities, and in making decisions that affect them
- Intentionally incorporate appropriate First Nations, Métis and Inuit art, cultural symbols, knowledges and structures within organizational and public spaces; fostering Indigenous peoples' presence and belonging throughout public spaces and activations.
 - Create a permanently accessible area dedicated to Indigenous cultural awareness resources for all staff.
- Build meaningful and equitable relationships and partnering with local Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Incorporate meaningful Land Acknowledgements in all formal staff gatherings and public events, and included in internal and external-facing documents.

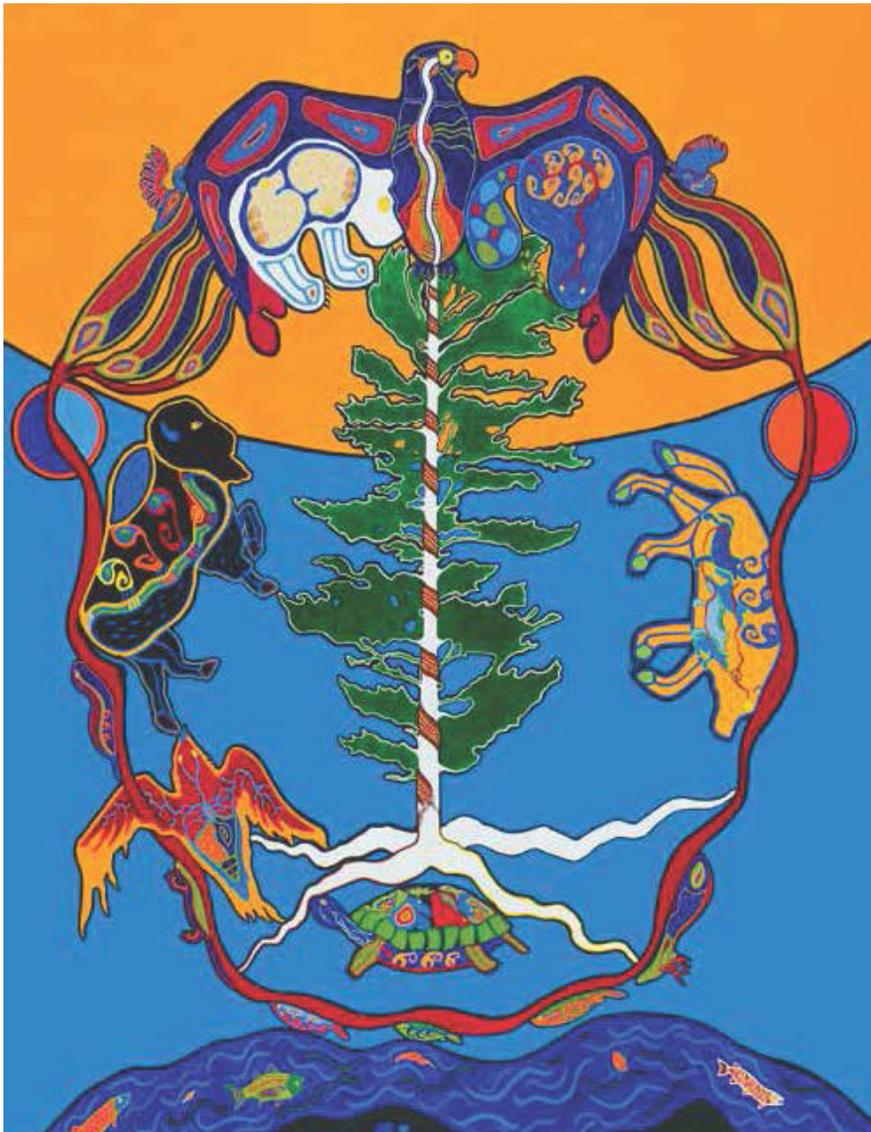
- Support Indigenous staff-led cultural awareness and education activities for staff and partners throughout the month of June in honour of Indigenous History Month.
- Recognize that Indigenous peoples have ownership, control, access, and possession of their information, knowledge, experiences, and stories (see Tool on Indigenous knowledges and data sovereignty)
- Develop value-added and reciprocal business development and procurement activities with Indigenous vendors and partners

Public Spaces & Municipal Bylaws

- Indigenous practitioners and community in many cities are frustrated about the barriers to and lack of dedicated, safe and culturally appropriate public spaces (natural and built) where Indigenous ceremonies and gatherings can be convened by and for Indigenous people. A key element of urban placekeeping and decolonizing the civic commons is for civic leaders to work with Indigenous partners to: decolonize public spaces i.e. being aware of and dismantling the settler colonial histories, policies and practices that have marginalized or erased Indigenous peoples from those spaces; and enable Indigenous transformations of those spaces to reflect Indigenous presence, belonging and cultural continuity.
 - Indigenous peoples have the right to access city lands, and the places upon them, as recognized through their inherent and/or treaty rights. There is tremendous need for improved education by municipalities about Indigenous rights within cities and urban public spaces and negotiations with Indigenous communities.
- Another frustration for the urban Indigenous community in cities is

the bylaw barrier to holding sacred fires, smudges and other ceremonial practices in public spaces, and building traditional structures in public spaces. Elders, community members and practitioners require permits and must navigate permissions processes that are often not well publicized, are long and costly. Enforcement by police officers and city officials is also quite challenging.

- How can municipalities work with Indigenous practitioners and community: to decolonize bylaws and practices to be more transparent, address barriers to sacred fires and other cultural practices/uses of public space experiences by Indigenous community; and to build cultural awareness and competency (including understanding Indigenous rights) and long-term relationships based on mutual trust, collaboration, reciprocity and reconciliation?
- E.g. City of Toronto, especially through the Indigenous Affairs Office, has been working to engage Indigenous community in Indigenous placekeeping and bylaw consultations to develop short and long term resolutions that are respectful and supportive of Indigenous cultural values and practices, and benefit the community's wellbeing.
- The mutual trust and reciprocity aspects of civic-Indigenous relationships is very apparent here in that if municipalities and civic organizations want advisory and creative input and consultation from Indigenous community, they have to be honest about what is the value they are offering the community as part of the exchange? Equitable access to public spaces and more cultural awareness in how Indigenous Elders and practitioners can navigate the municipal bylaws process for purposes of ceremony and cultural and stewardship practices on the land are two prominent areas for improved



Credit: Eagle & sun, KRISTY CAMERON, *The Seven Sacred Teachings Of White Buffalo Calf Woman* (Niizhwaaswi Aanike'iniwendiwinn Waabishiki Mashkode Bizhikiins Ikwe) 2009

Leadership & Governance

- Awareness that national, provincial/territorial and municipal governments are very different from Indigenous governance structures and it should not be assumed that settler government leadership and policy have been in consultation with Indigenous community, or represent their interests. The engagement principle of “nothing about us without us” should be adhered to by municipalities and organizations at every level of planning and decision-making on projects linked to Indigenous community. All decisions affecting community must be made by and in community so civic practitioners should make every attempt to go into community. Going into community shows how you practice and respect placekeeping.
- Youth leadership in contemporary placekeeping and innovation actions pushes knowledge and practice in more dynamic and uncharted directions that are vital for the evolution of Indigenous models and their influence across sectors. Civic programs would be prudent to invite youth leaders within engagement and co-creation processes, but to also invest in youth capacity building and leadership through diverse programming (arts, land stewardship, innovation) that reinforces their roles in self-determination and self-governance.