

TEACHING

Indigenous Principles for Civic Collaboration



In light of a long and tangled history of injustice and mistrust, how can we work together to build reciprocal and rigorous forms of engagement across Indigenous and civic institutions -- helping us move together toward more equitable and generative relationships, and mutually valuable outcomes?

Each nation and community has their own set of values and principles that protect their knowledges and interests, and guide relationship-building in diverse collaboration and partnership contexts. It is imperative that civic organizations and practitioners learn from and adhere to such principles for developing lasting relationships and best practices in placekeeping, city building and land stewardship. In thinking through an initial set of foundational principles that could help Indigenous and civic partners to achieve shared values and goals in urban placekeeping, the following sets of principles are curated from a mixture of sources including live engagement sessions with Indigenous practitioners and published frameworks based on input from either diverse First Nations or Inuit practitioners and community members.

As Indigenous peoples, each diverse nation lives by an ancient set of foundational laws, values, knowledges and powers that are grounded in their relationships with the Creator, the Earth and the sacred. They have been given to the people by the Creator and have been passed down intergenerationally through the oral tradition of stories, teachings, ceremonies, philosophical thought, and creative expressions such as dance, music and art. These teachings can be understood as core principles for the People's being in the world and living a good life in alignment with their roles and responsibilities as human beings. As shared principles, they also guide the People in their interconnected relationships with the Earth, kin and community, and the ancestors and spirit world; as well as in collaborative and business partnerships.

The Seventh Generation Principle

The Seventh Generation Principle is emblematic of Indigenous philosophy, ceremony and natural law and has lived through the teachings and lifeways of many Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island, Latin America and the Caribbean. The Principle is derived from the Gayanashagowa or Great Law of Peace/Great Binding Law, the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee Five Nation Confederacy (later six Nations)¹ that was passed down by Deganawida, the Peacemaker.

The Gayanashagowa forms the governance, ceremonial, spiritual and social foundations of the Haudenosaunee peoples and the Seventh Generation Principle particularly articulates an ancient philosophy that:

1 - Also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, arguably the oldest living participatory democracy in the world.

In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.

The thickness of your skin shall be seven spans which is to say that you shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Your heart shall be filled with peace and good will and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience you shall carry out your duty and your firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for your people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in your mind and all your words and actions shall be marked with calm deliberation. In all of your deliberations in the Confederate Council, in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self-interest shall be cast into oblivion. Cast not over your shoulder behind you the warnings of the nephews and nieces should they chide you for any error or wrong you may do, but return to the way of the Great Law which is just and right. Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground — the unborn of the future Nation.²

The Great Law of Peace from the Great Spirit is perfect, balanced, true and just in every way. Only when each person has the Living Laws of Peace within their heart, thoughts, words and actions will there be lasting peace among the Nations of the Earth.³ Deganawideh, The Peacemaker

2 - The Council of the Great Peace. (no official date but conjectured by Haudenosaunee historians to be written sometime between 1142 and 1500 AD). The Great Binding Law/ Gayanashagowa, the Constitution of the Five Nations Confederacy.

3 - Bouchard, D. & Dr. Joseph Martin. The Seven Sacred Teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman/ Niihwaaswi Aanike'iniwendiwon Waabishiki mashkode bizhikiins ikwe. (2009). North Vancouver: More Than Words Publishers.

While a sacred philosophy and pillar of governance for most Indigenous Nations, the Seventh Generation Principle has also inspired contemporary thinking and policy on sustainability, especially regarding long term decisions about harvesting and use of lands, waters and natural resources being made with a commitment to their sustainability for seven generations into the future. Civic leadership of cities of the future can model their design, planning and decision making on seven generations cities that are regenerative, co-creative and interconnected and require each of us to be caring and responsible stewards of the Indigenous lands at the foundation of cities.

Seventh generation principle and seven generation cities require us to be more truthful about the world we are leaving behind; and more generous, intuitive and 'seven generations-minded' in our city building for current and subsequent generations. Civic-Indigenous partnerships should similarly be guided by this philosophy so that relationships will be generative and mutually respectful and beneficial for many generations to come.

Seven sacred teachings/or Seven Grandfathers

Each Indigenous Nation's principles and values encode their inherent rights and responsibilities as the First People to occupy and care for their traditional lands; and the inherent rights of nature under natural law. For example, within the Anishnaabeg worldview, the seven sacred teachings or Seven Grandfathers are core principles and natural laws that guide the many dimensions of a person's life and outline their inherent rights and responsibilities. The Seven Grandfathers are⁴:

4 - Education Framework: Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit For Nunavut Curriculum. (2007). Nunavut Department of Education, Curriculum and School Services Division.

- **Zaagidiwin (Love):** There is no shortcut to achieving the state of love and you cannot know love unless you are courageous. You cannot know love unless you are honest. Love is based on the wisdom to understand one's self and the humility to accept weaknesses as well as being proud of one's strengths. Love has as its very core the other Teachings. The loving heart centre of each Uhkwehu:weh or true-hearted person lies within each of us.
- **Debwewin (Truth):** Truth lies in spirit. Give thanks, always. When you are thankful, good will come to you and to those you love. Mother Earth was created on the back of Turtle – Miskwaadesii. Look to Turtle to understand truth. There are thirteen Moons on her back; one for each moon cycle of one earth revolution around the sun. The Thirteen Moons and the Thirteen Grandmothers are signs that Mother Earth cares for you. Look to Turtle for one whose existence is strong and stable. Slow-moving Turtle understands, as you should, that the journey of life is as important as the destination.
- **Manaaj i'iwewin (Respect):** Look to Buffalo – Bashkode-bizhiki – for one who models Respect. And honour him. That Bashkode-bizhiki offers himself to sustain you does not make his life any less than yours. It makes it more. Not long ago countless Bashkodebizhiki roamed the west. I said that he would disappear if he was not respected. Is respect, like Bashkodebizhiki, disappearing from Turtle Island? Do not waste. Use all things wisely. Never take more than you need and always give away that which you do not use. And treat others as you would have them treat you, respectfully. Learn respect and learn balance. What goes up will come down. What you do for others will be done for you. What you give away will always come back to you in the One Circle.
- **Nibwaakaawin (Wisdom):** To live your life based on your unique gift is to live wisely. Look, listen and learn. Observe your life and the lives of others. By watching and listening, you can learn everything you need to know. Knowledge can be learned. Wisdom must be lived. Live and learn. Look into any clear lake. You do not see your reflection. You see that of those who came before you - the Ancestors. Through All Your Relations and this Teaching of Wisdom, you will come to use your gift to direct your life's journey. Do not live based on what you wish you were. Live in honour of what you are. If you have been given the gift of song, then sing. If yours is the gift of dance, then dance.
- **Dibaadendizowin (Humility):** Every day, the beauty and power of creation are ignited in the east. Are you not humbled by the strength and brilliance of the rising sun? Can you not sense that there is something much stronger than you out there? Accept how small and insignificant you are. For the betterment of yourself and all Creation, strive to be humble. Look to Wolf for humility. Observe how Wolf does not live for himself but for the pack. Watch him bow his head in the presence of others. He does this out of deference, not fright. Wolf understands what a small part of the whole he plays. His ultimate punishment is to be cast away from his community. Learn this kind of humility. Learn to not be arrogant. Do not think too highly of yourself. Do not want for yourself. Become Wolf. Become humble.
- **Gwaya kowaa diziwin (Honesty/To live a good life):** Now is the time for you to be honest with yourself; see and accept yourself for

who you are. Then and only then might you accept others for who they are. Be honest with yourself as well as with others. When you speak, speak truthfully. Kitchi-Sabe is the four-legged who walks on two legs. Sabe reminds us to be ourselves and not someone we are not. An honest person is said to walk tall like Kitchi-Sabe. Raven understands Honesty. Like Kitchi-Sabe, Raven accepts himself and knows how to use his gift. He does not seek the power, speed or beauty of others. He uses what he has been given to survive and thrive. To want more than you have been given is to suggest that the Creator has not given you enough. You have enough.

- **Aakodewin (Courage):** You understand to always act on what is right for you and for your family. To do what is right is not easy. It takes courage. It takes courage to heal that which is not well within you before being reborn. Become healer. Become Bear. Just as courage sleeps in Bear through long winter months, it is dormant within you. It need only be awakened. Observe Bear fight when her young are threatened. She will not stop until she overcomes any and all threats. In your life, you will need courage to transform fears that might prevent you from living a good life. Makwa shows you how to face fear and danger.

Medicine Wheel & Lodge Teachings

and Wyandot/Wendat Design Principles

The medicine wheel (also referred to as a lodge by some Nations) is a culturally embedded metaphor and teaching tool for many Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, with many Nations developing their own symbolism, teachings and adaptations of the medicine wheel.

Although the wheel may have specific thematic concepts overlaid onto the four quadrants, it often encodes (explicitly or implicitly) core teachings such as:

- The circle symbolizes wholeness, inclusion, feminine energy (womb), and eternity.
- The four directions of a healing journey (South, West, North, East).
- The four basic elements of Mother Earth (earth, water fire and air).
- The four dimensions of the human condition and wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual).
- Natural laws are based on observations of and interrelationships with the natural world, and are aligned with the sacred laws bestowed by the Creator (e.g. love, respect, truth, reconciliation and peace).
- The four stages of the life cycle (child, youth, adult, Elder).

The Medicine wheel represents a series of interconnected relationships that enable the people to find their place and sense of balance in the world – when they follow the teachings of the wheel, they learn to live in a more balanced way with “all our relations.” Medicine wheel teachings have long been used by First Nations Elders, knowledge keepers, teachers as a holistic paradigm and tool for conceptualizing, teaching, embodying and monitoring approaches to community health, spirituality, philosophy, education and governance.

There is also a recognition that the teachings, and whatever spiritual and thematic concepts are being incorporated, interact with external social, environmental and political systems.

Wyandot Faith-Keeper and artist Catherine Támmaro designed the following Lodge to represent the Wyandot/Wendat paradigm and understanding of placekeeping principles and activations:

- The Lodge is meant to be dome-like in shape and multi-dimensional, sitting in both Spirit and materiality.
- The People enter the Lodge from the Eastern doorway, where they are born into the natural world and are provided with the first instructions on how they should live a good life and conduct themselves in the world. The Seed is the Law refers to the seeds of peace that the Peacemaker planted, which resulted in the Kayenla'kowa, the Great Law of Peace. Through the honourable harvest of the seeds of peace, there is truth and a birthing of peoples, ideas, projects, and generative actions. Placekeepers learn activation aspects, keeping the sacred principles in mind.
- While in the Lodge, we are always rooted in the Earth (*qmeʔtsáʔ*), Nature, the physical realm. We are located in the centre and can navigate any of the four directions and associated teachings from that

central space of Placekeeping, Community and the Original Instructions given by the Creator to the People.

- Placekeeping in community is guided by the Original Instructions, situated in place on the land. Placekeeping represents: all forms of relationship to and care-taking of place and land, and creative expression about place; learning from the ancestors and preparing for the future generations; and life, death and rebirth.
- The Sky (*yarqnyaʔ*) and its blue aura envelops the Lodge in Spirit and Mystery, the Unseen. Unknown forces provide our pathway and method for the Placekeeper’s vessel of creativity, enabling creative freedoms.
- The Northern doorway (*hatú:ʔyeh*) is the spiritual dimension where the Ancestors reside and provide guiding consultation to the Elders and Placekeepers. The Ancestors and Wendat Peacemaker are behind us and the future generations are in front of us – they teach Placekeepers to make decisions that will guide and sustain the next seven generations. The Treaty rights and sovereignty of Indigenous Nations are to be honoured and respected. Community engagement fosters belonging to land, place, kin and community.
- The Southern doorway (*kyehkqmah*) teaches Placekeepers to love ourselves, to love family and community, and to love the land – acting as caring environmental stewards for the next seven generations. Placekeepers commit to using design concepts and methods that are in harmony with and non-invasive to the land, non-invasive; using designs and materials found in nature.

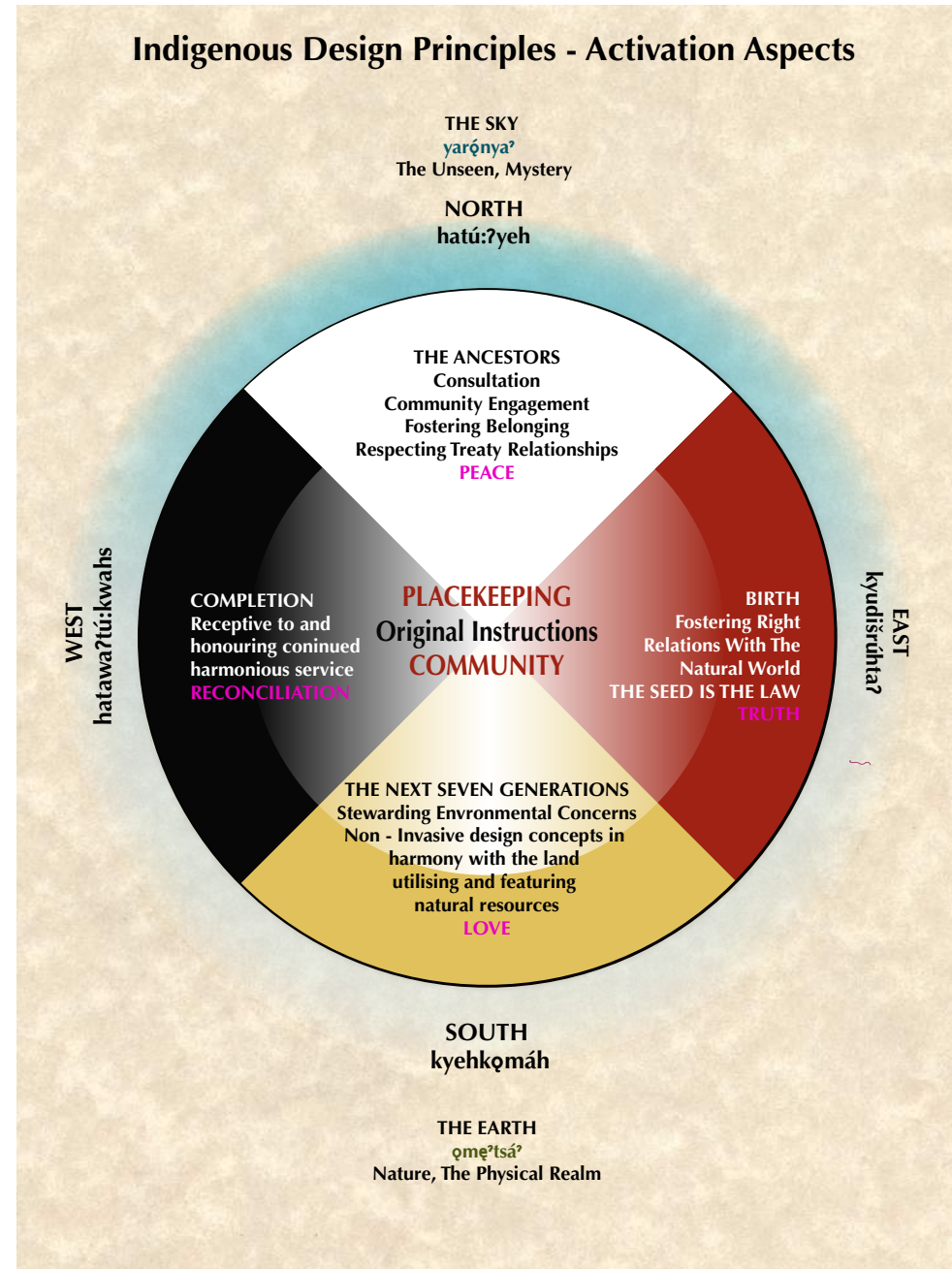
- The Western doorway (**hatawa?tú:kwahs**) brings our Placekeeping actions to completion, knowing that our relationships and work honour a continued, harmonious service to the land, place and community. Humans must first reconcile with the Earth and all her beings and landscapes about all of the harm and broken responsibilities that have take place. After this, settlers can focus on the road to reconciliation with Indigenous Nations: to be honest about the truth of Indigenous lands and sovereignty; and to repair and build healthy and equitable relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)/ Inuit Ways of Knowing

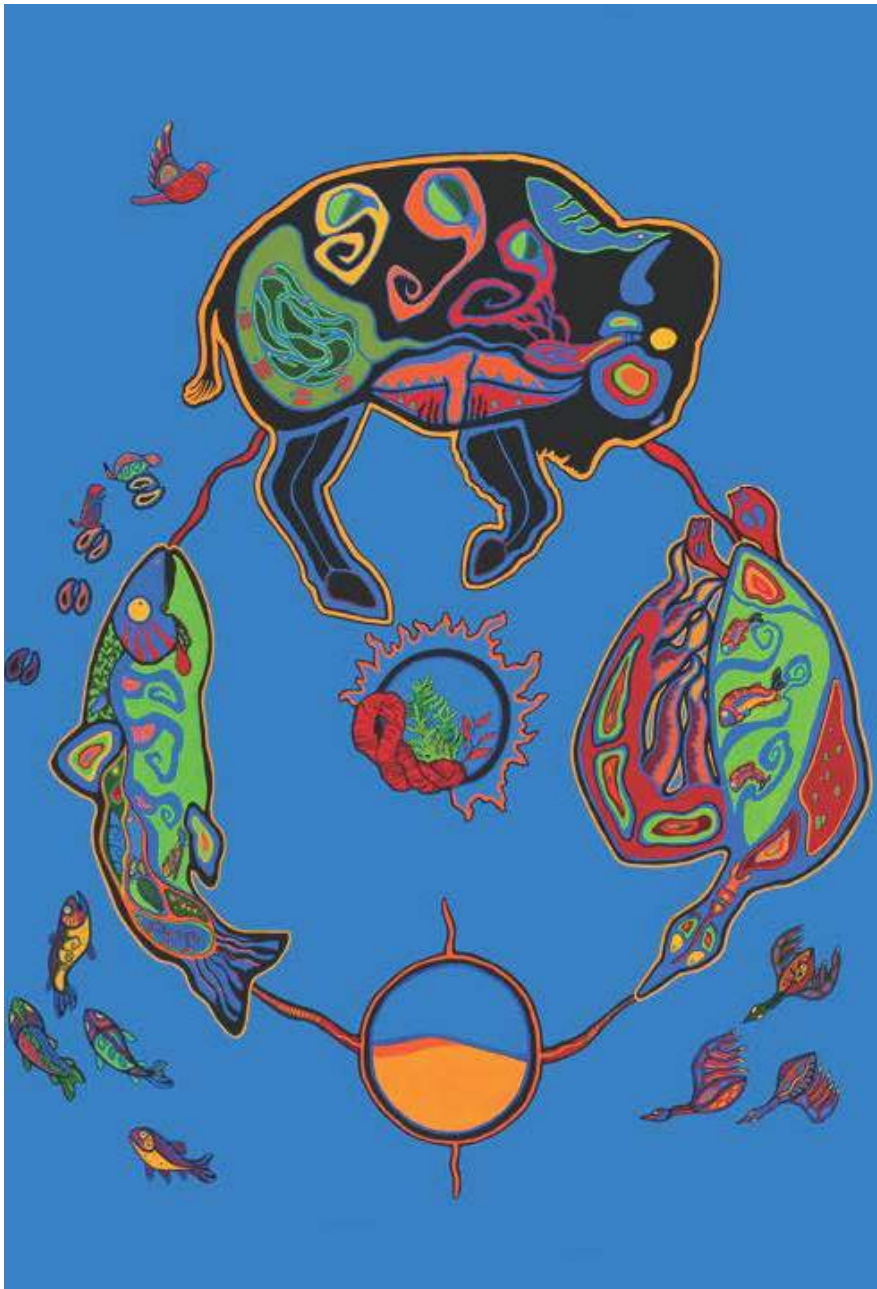
For the four Inuit regions across the nunangat, Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) or Inuit ways of knowing is the guiding backbone for the people to live according to their values.

IQ values, practices and ways of being and living in the world are commonly held and practiced by the People and socialized by Inuit Elders, knowledge-keepers, government, teachers and community practitioners. The Government of Nunavut has incorporated Inuit societal values into legislation, policy, operations, programming, research, workplace culture and practices, and community engagement protocols across all sectors including culture and heritage, education, health, environment and climate change, and livelihoods and economic development. The following values are thus alive in every facet of Inuit life and act as a framework of holistic principles for Inuit relationships with the land, kin, community and collaborators; capacity building and innovation; governance and community development; and ceremonial and cultural practice⁵:

5 - Relationship Building with First Nations and Public Health Research Team. (2017). Relationship building with First Nations and public health: Exploring principles and



Credit: Wyandot/Wendat Lodge and Design activation principles, Catherine Támmaro



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

- Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (respecting others, relationships and caring for people);
- Tunnganarniq (fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive);
- Pijitsirniq (serving and providing for family and community);
- Aajiiqatigiinni (decision making through discussion and consensus);
- Pilimmaksarniq/Pijariuqsarniq (development of skills through practice, effort, action);
- Piliriqatigiinni or Ikajuqtigiinni (working together for a common cause);
- Qanuqtuurniq (being innovative and resourceful); and
- Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq (respect and care for the land, animals and the environment)

Although the environmental, social, political and economic contexts framing and conditioning the way Inuit live is always dynamic, changing and often influenced by external actors and events, Inuit Elders maintain that their core values and teachings are constant and always relevant. They are important teachings not only for Inuit but also for the world – with so much value for civic-Indigenous partnerships.

practices for engagement to improve community health – Literature Review. Sudbury, ON: Locally Driven Collaborative Projects. <https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/FirstNationsTeam_LiteratureReview_FINAL.pdf>

Collaborative Partnerships

Indigenous approaches to urban placekeeping, city building, innovation, land stewardship, food sovereignty and community development reflect a holistic and systems-based understanding of the complex and interconnected nature of both the challenges facing Indigenous peoples in cities, and the multi-faceted solutions that will be most relevant.

Civic initiatives and partnerships with Indigenous community that are meaningfully guided by and infused with the particular or commonly held First Nations, Métis and Inuit values and principles of partners will achieve more meaningful relationships and outcomes. Mutual trust and respect create the basis of strong relationships with Indigenous peoples and require a level of deep learning, time and commitment, and honouring the distinct rights, cultural values and practices, governance and social models, and priorities.

For trust and respect to develop genuinely, there is a need for civic practitioners to be humble enough to admit they do not know everything, and should not make assumptions about the diverse contexts, perspectives and priorities of Indigenous peoples. This principle resonates within the cultural awareness framework based on interlocking values of humility, awareness, sensitivity, and competence. Practitioners must open their minds (and hearts) to worldviews and methodologies that are different from the professional ethos and principles they have been trained in, ready to listen and learn from the values, experiences and expertise of Indigenous partners. When entering into relationship with Indigenous community – from municipal projects to community health initiatives – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners stress the importance for settlers to be humble, aware of their relative positionality, and committed to consistent learning and evolution in their engagement and collaboration practices.

A valuable and culturally appropriate approach to collaboration entails civic practitioners to working with Indigenous partners to gain cultural literacy and competency, adapting the elements of an initiative to the particular values and perspectives of the partner community. This approach is very different from the tendency of many organizations and governments to expect Indigenous partners to contort their knowledges and priorities to fit dominant civic design, planning, policy, and governance practices that have historically caused a lot of damage to Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Etuaptmuk/ Two-eyed Seeing & Ethical Space

The process of building mutual respect and value is a lifelong journey of humility, self-reflection and (un)learning settler colonial dominance --where civic practitioners can listen to Indigenous partners without judgement, and be self-aware of the dynamics and reproduction of settler power, privilege and biases within placekeeping and city building projects. Practices inspired by Indigenous teachings that honour the diversity of Indigenous cultural protocols, principles and practices in collaboration with civic approaches can also reinforce humility, understanding and respect.⁶ The teachings of two-eyed seeing and ethical space are particularly relevant to processes of Indigenous cultural competency, intercultural engagement, building trust, and collaborative and participatory processes for dialogue and co-design.

6 - Relationship Building with First Nations and Public Health Research Team. (2017). Relationship building with First Nations and public health: Exploring principles and practices for engagement to improve community health – Literature Review. Sudbury, ON: Locally Driven Collaborative Projects. <https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/FirstNationsTeam_LiteratureReview_FINAL.pdf>

Etuaptmuk or two-eyed seeing is a teaching championed by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall and outlines, "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledge and ways of knowing...and learning to use both these eyes together."⁷

Two-eyed seeing explores the integration of multiple perspectives (i.e. Indigenous and settler worldviews) to create a holistic understanding of multi-faceted relationships, experiences, content and processes. This process requires that those engaged understand the whole, integral nature of each Indigenous worldview or knowledge system (represented as a whole eye), alongside the whole, distinct nature of the settler system (also represented as a whole eye); while enabling these two eyes to work together (as they do in binocular vision).

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6 - Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., and Marshall, A. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing and other Lessons Learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4): 331-340.

This teaching also calls on our understanding that in some circumstances such as Indigenous placekeeping and innovation initiatives, the strengths within the Indigenous world should be dominant in the process. Whereas in other circumstances such as a broad-based municipal program, the strengths of multiple settler and Indigenous perspectives would be more relevant. Two-Eyed Seeing can therefore require a "weaving back and forth" between perspectives, and this will draw upon abilities to meaningfully and respectfully engage in an informed manner in collaborative settings.⁸

Most invaluably, two-eyed seeing refers to the ability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to engage in a process of mutual respect for one another's values and practices, while building a shared platform of learning and knowledge translation, and balanced understanding. In coincidence with this teaching, and with the aim of developing and enabling opportunities and synergies that will benefit Indigenous community outcomes, civic organizations can use a two-eyed seeing approach to engagement and project development, inviting the multiple perspectives and active participation of Indigenous collaborators at every stage of project co-design, planning and delivery.

Ethical space⁹ is an encounter between the distinct (and often opposing) worldviews of Indigenous and settler groups, where the space created in the middle enables respectful, cooperative and collaborative engagement. The intersection between their respective systems of knowledge, governance, science, law, economics, culture and spirituality can be quite fragile and often fraught with the weight of history and future expectations.

8 - Ibid.

8 - Ermine, W. (2007). Ethical Space of Engagement, *Indigenous Law Journal: Looking Forward: Paths to a New Relationship*. 6(1): 193-203.

Sharing community stories, organizing recurring community meetings, and using participatory and Indigenous-informed communication tools can support ethical spaces for healthy, respectful discussions and decision making.

Indigenous-led ethical standards in research and data sovereignty; and more equitable rules of engagement with the inherent Aboriginal Rights and Treaty Rights provisions under Canadian Law (and especially landmark Supreme Court decisions)¹⁰ have provided an ethical space as a framework for dialogue and intercultural communication between Indigenous Nations and settler governments, institutions and practitioners.

Common principles to guide collaborative partnerships¹¹

- Community engagement and relationship-building are foundational to every process and project.
- Build internal values and competencies within the organization in support of Indigenous leadership, engagement and cultural awareness.
- Engage and consult early and often throughout a project.
- Community-driven, inclusive and representative of the diversity of community voices.
- Provide time to understand the experiences and emotions embodied in people's stories.
- Create spaces and opportunities for Indigenous community actors to share their reflections, concerns and ideas.
- Identify appropriate solutions and roles to leverage individual and collective capacities.
- Consult Indigenous knowledges and methodologies to shape processes and inform decisions.

10 - Curated list adapted from consultations with Indigenous partners and various materials on Indigenous engagement and reconciliation: Walker, Jojola and Natcher (2013) *Reclaiming Indigenous Planning*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. Coalition of Inclusive Communities. (2019). *Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: A Holistic Approach* International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities: Toolkit for Inclusive Municipalities in Canada and Beyond, Canadian Commission for UNESCO with the support of International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR). Indigenous Working Group of the BC Association of Social Workers. (2016). *Towards a New Relationship: Toolkit for Reconciliation/Decolonization of Social Work Practice at the Individual, Workplace, and Community Level*, prepared by the British Columbia Association of Social Workers.

Wyandot/Wendat Lodge and Design activation principles, Catherine Támara.

10 - See Tool: Understanding Indigenous Sovereignty & Rights

- Get educated about and honour Indigenous sovereignty, governance and inherent rights (related to lands in cities) in urban planning, design and decision making.
- Prioritize land stewardship and land-based approaches, strive for responsible development.
- Reflect on and understand how your municipality can improve its own policies, practices, procedures and institutional values to achieve fully respectful relationships.
- Advance mutually respectful and cooperative dialogue, consensus decision making and collaboration skills.
- Once a baseline understanding has been achieved, reach out to Indigenous practitioners and community leaders, and start to build a respectful relationship based on a true appreciation for each other that will evolve over time.
- Collaboratively create shared content and value within the design development process to ensure the results reflect Indigenous people's cultural values, identities and expressions; are usable and relevant; and meet their needs and desired outcomes.
- Bring an open mind and an open heart, and be ready to challenge yourself and your preconception.



Credit: Leland Bell. Seven Grandfathers