

SO YOU'VE INVITED AN INDIGENOUS SPEAKER?

Protocols for Interacting with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers

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GETTING STARTED

Indigenous Peoples and communities are diverse - there is no, single pan-Indigenous way of being or knowing. While many communities share commonalities, each First Nation, Inuit or Metis community has a distinct culture and set of practices. What we've offered below are minimum protocols for respect when interacting with Indigenous peoples and inviting them into your communities in the Canadian (Northern Turtle Island) context. You are invited to do more learning and to practice curiosity when connecting with specific peoples in your specific contexts.

ELDERS AND KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Elders and knowledge keepers are those recognized within their own communities as people who hold and share traditional knowledge and experience. Oftentimes when Elders are invited to speak they are sharing personal stories and from their experiences. It's helpful to be aware of the emotional labour that people are being asked to do. There are times in which an event should not go ahead without being informed by local Indigenous knowledge. For example, at a KAIROS Blanket Exercise it is required for an Indigenous co-facilitator be included, and that an honorarium be offered to them.

ELDERS/KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS CAN:

- Share knowledge and stories
- Offer intro and/or outro prayers/ceremony
- Comfort participants during the exercise through presence, or taking a person aside to talk, being available for listening, prayer, etc.
- Create safety when other Indigenous or persons of colour are participating





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WHERE TO FIND AN ELDER?

- Research Indigenous ministry leaders in your own denomination or those nearby
- Research local Indigenous agencies (ie, your local [Friendship Centre](#)) and schools/universities that may have Indigenous liaisons
- If you're hosting a KAIROS Blanket Exercise there is often a network of people willing to help. CRC staff can suggest co-facilitators that they already work with. Additionally staff at KAIROS can offer contacts.

COMMUNICATION

- When reaching out to Elders/Knowledge Keepers, be aware of your words and internal biases. Be respectful and avoid terms that may be offensive (review this [Indigenous Terminology guide](#) to learn more). Elders truly are 'elders' and keepers of sacred knowledge and should be approached with deference and courtesy.
- Consider how you're telling stories about Indigenous peoples - challenge the 'one-sided' stereotypes of colonization - ask yourself if you'd tell stories about your own family in the same ways
- Ensure a balance of positive and negative - it's crucial to emphasize Indigenous resilience and excellence at the same time as talking about the trauma their communities have experienced - otherwise, it's sensationalization. Indigenous peoples are not victims with no agency, the gifts and culture and their own self-determination should be centered
- Do not 'speak for the voiceless' - no one is voiceless, but many settlers do not have ears to hear. Indigenous voices matter and they know what is best for their communities
 - Always get consent before sharing stories that are not your own

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Learn more about these protocols and more with these resources:
 - [KAIROS Tobacco Offering Protocol](#)
 - [Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Elders](#)
 - [Elders Protocol and Guidelines](#)



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HONORARIUMS AND OFFERING GIFTS

- In the same way that you would offer an honorarium for pulpit supply it is important to plan for an honourarium for Indigenous Elders/Knowledge Keepers who are invited to share at your event. Their lived-experience and knowledge are valuable, and it is just and equitable that they be honoured in the same way as any other guest speaker. Keep in mind that an elder is likely a retired senior, and may be living on a fixed income, and so you/your group should cover the full costs of their participation in your event.
- An honorarium should cover (but be not limited to) the cost of travel and the person's time. A minimum of \$125 is recommended for an event of a couple hours, like a KAIROS Blanket Exercise or bringing greetings to open an event. A rate of at least \$60/hr plus travel costs should apply for longer engagements (ie, a day of training). We recommend asking the person how they'd like to receive the honourarium (ie, cheque, cash, e-transfer, etc.,) as they may require the funds immediately to cover their travel costs.
- An honour gift is also sometimes appropriate to give (in addition to an honourarium). Do some research into the local context of the community your guest comes from - perhaps there's a specific appropriate gift to give. Or, there may be something meaningful from your context to give (ie, a church quilt group gifting a blanket). Consider what is locally and culturally appropriate.

GIFTING TOBACCO

- A gift of tobacco is often suggested. It is one of the four sacred medicines, and is a traditional gift in many Indigenous communities that is given when making a request (in this case, requesting the Elder to share their knowledge with you/your community). If they receive it, it means they agree to the request. Some communities (like in coastal BC) tobacco is not a common gift. Choosing another kind of gift may require some local inquiries. One elder from Bella Bella, BC, very happily received a gift of coffee beans and generously reciprocated.
 - It could be a bunch/bundle, a pouch/tie, etc.
 - It should be offered when making the request, if it's possible to be in-person. If your event arrangements are via phone/email, offer the tobacco at the beginning of the event. (Some prefer to receive it before they start, rather than in front of everyone - ask them their preference when they arrive).
 - If you're not sure where to find tobacco, or how to make a bundle, [check out this guide](#), or contact us and we can help! cimc@crcna.org